

The BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Devoted To Far West Life



BUFFALO BILL'S
SIOUX TACKLE

OR PAWNEE BILL'S CANOE TRAIL

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"



STREET & SMITH,
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As he flew past, the scout's fingers hooked around his ankle,
and he came crashing to the ground.

THE BUFFALO BILL



A WEEKLY PUBLICATION **STORIES** DEVOTED TO BORDER LIFE

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BUFFALO BILL'S SIOUX TACKLE;

OR,

Pawnee Bill's Canoe Trail.

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CHAPTER I.

BILL GARNER.

A white man, who had crawled out of the bush in the sacred grove of the Blackfeet, sat listening to the excited exclamations of a negro:

"Woof! All dat gol' done gone. A hoss load o' gol'!"

Running to the pit of yellow earth before him, the negro dropped down and began to claw frantically.

"Not a nugget o' dat gol' lef'!" he yelled. "Dis hyuh is de wuk o' Buff'lo Bill. Yes, suh!"

He seemed on the point of dashing wildly out of the grove when he caught sight of the white man, now sitting beside the bush with a cocked revolver resting on his knee.

He was a very tattered and unkempt white man, with piercing gray eyes and a tangle of black hair. His face showed sad need of a razor.

"I reckon you had better tell me about that, Rastus," he called out. "What I has heerd sounds like more."

With mouth dropped open, the negro stared as if he could not believe his eyes.

"Is dat you, Bill Garner?"

"Same old sport. Tell me about that gold which seems to 'a' slipped through your fingers, and we'll perceed ter garner it in."

The negro picked up the club-shaped bag of weasel skin which had fallen from his hand, and shuffled toward the white man. But he was trembling, and his manner was undecided.

"There was a lot of gold in that hole, I heerd you say; and you think Buffler Bill's crowd lifted it. They moved down the river las' night, an' aire now camped at Antelope Bend. Climb to the top o' that mountain an' you might be able to see 'em, if yer eyes aire good."

Clutching the weasel skin tightly, the negro dropped down; but his manner was still undecided.

"You know me?"

"Suah I does."

The white man laughed.

"Know me too well, you think. I ain't seen you sence I was with Morgan in that whisky-runnin' bizness, down on the old Missou'. You was with him then."

"Mawgan's daid."

"Dead, eh? Sence when did that happen?"

"De Buff'lo Killer Sioux kilt him. Dey raided de cabin down dah, tuk mos' o' de whisky we had cached, an' knocked ol' Mawgan on de haid wid a hatchet. Um-um! dem was bad times."

"You seem to 'a' lived through it."

"Yes, suh. I made friends wid 'em. Dey was one cache o' whisky dat dey hadn't foun', an' I showed hit tuh 'em. Dat's huc-come dey saved my life, out uh ingratitude fo' dat whisky."

Bill Garner laughed again.

"Buff'lo Bill, he was chasin' Mawgan," the negro continued, "an' he got mixed up wid de ol' Black Chief an' de Black Chief's chillen. Dat's huc-come he is heah in dis country now—'count o' de Black Chief's chillen an' de Black Chief's gol'. You recom-membeh de Black Chief?"

"Cert'in."

"White man wid black whiskehs, what was chief o' dem Buff'lo Killer Sioux, en' crazy. He went back tuh his home in de Eas' wid his chillen. Den his recommembry come back tuh him strong, an' he reck-lected 'bout some gol' what he had cached up heah by dis mountain. Dat made him go back tuh de Sioux—'ca'se he wanted tuh git dat gol'."

"An' Buffler Bill tried ter git it fer him?"

"Boss, you is goin' too fas'. De Black Chief died in de Sioux village, and didn't git tuh come up heah. But he writ a letteh, which he hid in dis ve'y ident'cal medisum bag ob weasel skin, tellin' whah dat gol' is; and sent news 'bout it by ol' Ned Bunker—you know ol' Ned Bunker?—sent news by him tuh Buff'lo Bill an' tuh his chillen.

"Along 'bout dat time I am hidin' out."

"Same old game."

"I am hidin' out when Bunker, he comes travelin' 'long; and I heahs him in his camp, talkin' tuh heself 'bout dat gol'. De medisum bag wid de letteh o' construction sayin' wha' is dis gol' is bu'ied, he says, on top o' dem fune'al scaffolds—you know 'bout dem fune'al scaffolds, an' how de Sioux puts dey daid chiefs on um?—well, he was talkin' tuh heself 'bout dat, an' 'bout de gol', when I'm layin' in de grass lissenin'.

"So I goes to dem scaffolds in de night and gits dis heah ve'y medisum bag."

He held up the weasel skin.

"An' de letteh o' construction 'bout whe' tuh fin' de gol' is in it. I has got it now."

He drew it out, and showed it to Bill Garner.

"It was cached by that pine up thar," said Garner; "that's how I make it out."

He glanced at the yellow mound before him in the pine grove.

"But you was lookin' for it hyar in the grove?"

"I foun' hit by dat pine; an' I cached hit down heah fo' safety."

"And Buffler Bill got it?"

"Mus' be dat way. He was heah wid his crowd huntin' fo' it, de Black Chief's chillen wid him; and

Ruff Reynolds' crowd, dey was heah huntin' fo' it, too. An' he done captured Ruff Reynolds' men, an' whipped off de Injuns——"

"Reds mixed up in it, too?"

"'Twas a pow'ful mix-up. Dah was Blackfeet hyuh, as well as Sioux; an' I had tuh hide out. When dey is all gone I come in hyuh, jes' now, an' de gol' is done gone, too!"*

He groaned.

"I saw a dead Sioux down by the river," said Garner reflectively.

"Ruff's men kilt him. I seen de fight. Dat Sioux belong tuh Blue Wolf's crowd, and de Black Chief's chillen was wid 'em at de time. Dat's how de Black Chief's chillen come tuh be Ruff's pris'nehs. All dat happen befo' Ruff an' his men is tuck in by Buff'lo Bill."

"Lively doin's."

"Yes, suh; dey sho' was."

"Now about that gold?"

"I has been tellin' you all I knows."

"There was a lot of it?"

"A hoss load, boss!"

"That's a pile."

"I neveh did see so much gol' in mah life—dat's a fac'. I mos' break mah back cyarryin' hit down heah. Mus' 'a' been a million dollars' wuf o' gol' nuggets; yas, suh!"

"'Twould take a herd of elephants to carry a mil-lion dollars wuth o' gold, Rastus. Gold is heavy."

"Don't I know it, dat it is heavy, after cyarryin' hit down heah? Ef hit wasn't a hoss load, hit was a pony load; an' I sho' sticks by dat. I neveh did see so much gol'. An' now it's done gone, eve'y nugget!"

"Look round a bit, Rastus, an' see what you can find, while I do some thinkin' an' climb up to the top of that mountain. How many men has Buffler Bill got?"

"Only des five, wid himself."

"That's not many."

"'Pen's a heap o' who dem men is, you know."

"That's so, too. Who aire they?"

"Dar's Buff'lo Bill heself—de fust an' fo'most one. Den comes dat feller who is lately trailin' round wid him so much, what is called Pawnee Bill."

"Two of a kind—and hard to beat."

"Yas, suh, dey is. En afteh dem comes dat ol' Injun-fightin' man."

"Nick Nomad. He's been with Cody a long time."

"An' de Dutchman; an' de Piute Injun. An' also de Black Chief's chillen—which I didn't count, 'ca'se dey is bofe young, an' one is a gal, dough she w'ars men's clo'es."

"A bad crowd to tackle. How many pris'ners they got?"

"'Bout a dozen, er mo'; de whole o' Ruff Reynolds' men what ain't daid."

*"For a full account of the things mentioned in the negro's story, see the last two numbers—No. 554, "Buffalo Bill's Thunder-bolt;" and No. 535, "Buffalo Bill's Sioux Circus."

"A gang like that to look after must hamper 'em a heap. They've got to guard 'em close, to keep a crowd like that frum gittin' loose. It makes the outlook seem better, Rastus."

He walked over and inspected the yellow hole, all that remained of the negro's cache.

Then he started off to climb the mountain.

The negro stood up, looking after the white man, as he disappeared. He shook his head slowly and doubtfully.

"I dunno 'bout 'dis," he muttered.

When Bill Garner came down from the mountain, he reported that he had seen the smoke of camp fires, indicating the location of Buffalo Bill's party.

"Now, I'll lay out my plan to you," he said, and led the way down to the bank of the little stream, where he had seen the dead body of the Sioux.

A search of the body of the warrior secured a few weapons of no value and a box of Indian paint.

"This is what I was lookin' for," said Garner, holding up the paint. "With your help, Rastus, I reckon I can make myself over into a mighty good-lookin' Sioux ki-yi; an' thar ain't many Sioux can talk their language better. Put this feller's duds on me—he ain't got many; stick his feathers in my hair, and wrap his greasy blanket round me, and thar ain't ary sheriff in ten States would scent me out fer what I am. How does it strike ye?"

"En den what?" said the negro.

"Then we'll take the trail of Buffler Bill's crowd, and watch fer a chance ter play my little game. A hoss load o' gold! Why, ef we had that, Rastus, we c'd fill our necks ter ther fust j'int with red licker every day o' our lives, an' then some. We're goin' to corral that hoss load of gold."

"How you goin' tuh do it? If Buff'lo Bill is got dat gol', hit is sho' goin' tuh be watched close; ain't no come-aginary Injun kin walk in an' put his fingers on hit! No, suh."

"Fer Buffler Bill's crowd, it is a long trail frum hyar back ter safety."

"You was a mighty ingenious man when you an' ol' Mawgan was runnin' dat whisky bizness. I recom-membeh dat well," said Rastus, gathering hope.

Garner laughed, as he proceeded to strip the body of the Sioux.

"If you go to fannin' me with roses right at the start, Rastus, you'll make me so proud o' my smartness I'm likely to fall down on this job. But if I had anything to bet you, an' you had anything to put up, I'd go ye somethin' handsome that I turn this trick."

The negro twisted anxiously.

"How much is yo' goin' tuh cha'ge me, Misteh Garner, if you gits all dat gol' away f'm 'em fo' me?" he asked.

"We're goin' to divvy even—that's the way I was figgerin' it." He stood up, smiling, his face flushed. "You found it—that's half o' the game; I resky it out o' the hands o' the men who stole it frum ye—that's the second half. So it looks like an even divvy would

about do, eh? That ought to suit you, seein' that you ain't goin' to git anything, if I don't."

"I doan't know 'bout dat. I might play dat game meself."

"You don't even know what I'm goin' to do, do you?"

"Not edzackly—dat is a fac'."

"Well, you won't know, till I'm ready to put it through. Then you'll agree that it's pretty slick goods."

He proceeded to array himself in the Sioux's clothing, after which, under his direction, the negro applied the paint.

Before it was finished he had shaved, with a razor drawn out of his bootleg, and with the paint, the Sioux clothing and moccasins, the head feathers, and the greasy blanket, he was in every respect a Sioux, outwardly.

CHAPTER II.

THE TROUBLE MAKER.

The baron trailed the flame of a match over the tobacco in his pipe and smoked up, as Nick Nomad came plunging back from the edge of the cottonwoods.

"I dunno whether them Sioux out thar is goin' ter fight er run," Nomad reported.

"Ach! dare iss going to be no fightin'," the baron grumbled. "Dem Inchuns know vich site oof dheir putter dheir pread iss on."

"Anyhow, et makes me oneasy ter be roostin' hyar, when mebbysome hot fightin' is erbout due. Red Hand ain't likin' et none, thet we aire back-trackin' ererost his territory. He tried ter make et hot fer us when we went past hyar before. An' now he's got a lot o' his waryers out thar, an——"

"Unt vill do notting budt make some noises mit his moudth."

"In course, you ain't ther worryin' kind, baron; an' ye're never so happy as when trouble is comin' like hailstorms. But——"

The baron removed his pipe and held up his hand.

"You do nodd stand under me!" he expostulated. "Idt iss nodd drouple vot makes me habby, but der oxcidement; unt in cheneral you cand't haf der excitement mitout der drouple at der same dimes. Yaw, dot iss idt. Vor dwo tays now ve haf nodd hadt enough excitement."

"Waugh!" Nomad grumbled. "You're as cur'us a critter as I has ever met up with. Ain't we in an excitin' sitooation this very minute—ain't we? Out thar is Buffler, facin' redskins thet aire itchin' fer our ha'r. As ef thet ain't ernough, he has got Ruff Reynolds an' his crowd with him, holdin' em pris'ners, tied ter their caballos; but ready ter be let loose ef ther fightin' comes, Buffler calc'latin' thet Ruff's bunch will shore fight on ther right side when their lives aire at stake. Tork erbout excitement! Why, baron——" Words

failing, Nomad waved his hands. "And hyar we aire, me an' you, lef' in charge o' ther camp, an' all thet gold ter watch!"

"Dot gelt, he can't roon away!" the baron objected.

"Not onless ther ki-yis push Buffler hard, and raid through hyar an' take et. Er Ruff's crowd don't play ther pizen act an' do suthin' too mean fer words."

"Der brosbect oof eidher iss not goot. Dare iss dot gelt, py der back oof my muel on right now; unt der muel, he iss eadting der grass so kviet as nice. Der gottonvoods iss hiting us vrom der sights oof der Inchuns. Nopoty iss knowing dot ve ar-re here. So how iss dare going to be any drouple? Unt oof no drouple iss coming, how iss dare going to be any habbiness oof oxcitement?"

"Schnitz," Nomad snorted in disgust, "I'm shore hopin' thet some day you'll git yer stummick full o' excitement."

"Yaw," returned the baron placidly. "Me der same-ness. Budt idt aind't going to be to-day, I pedt you."

"You're a trouble hunter; an' ye don't know when ye find et."

"I tond't git der shance to make his acquaintance very often," the baron grumbled. "Oof I go to sleebe, unt somedings sdarts, vill you vake me oop? I wouldn't vant to miss idt."

Pulling his little fore-and-aft cap into his eyes, the baron snuggled back against the bole of a cottonwood, and blew out a whiff of smoke.

"Hear 'em yellin'?" said Nomad.

"Yaw. I hear 'em. Dot iss notting. An Inchun has to holler, yoost der same as a dog, he iss got to bark. You tond't hear any guns; so I say dare vill be no fighting."

"Wow! Thar goes a gun! Baron, I has got ter take another look. Keep yer eyes open while I'm doin' it."

"Vun gun tond't make no pattle, no more as vun swaller makes a glass oof peer! Look oof you vant to; I vill keep my eyes vide oben."

He pulled his cap farther over his eyes, then closed them, and smoked away blissfully, while the excitable trapper was hurrying to the edge of the cottonwoods again, to determine the status of things out on the open plains.

The camp was in a crook of the upper Missouri, well screened by the cottonwood growth, with the stream a quarter of a mile away, and high grass all around, where there were no trees. This description does not apply to the plains. There the grass was no more than two or three inches high—the short, crisp buffalo grass of that country.

So secure did the baron feel, in this secluded nook, knowing that between the camp and the threatening Sioux were Buffalo Bill and Pawnee, with Little Cayuse, and outlaw prisoners who were to be loosed if fighting came, that he permitted himself to drop into a cat nap while Nomad was away.

Out of this the baron was aroused by a light foot-

step, and, looking up, he saw a feathered head and a painted face.

Dropping his pipe, the baron clutched the revolver at his side, and came up with a bound, under the impression that a number of Sioux had stolen into the camp.

Then he saw that there was only one.

"Vot iss?" he snapped, swinging the revolver forward.

"Heap fine white man," said the Indian.

"Keeb off!" commanded the baron. "Oddervise you vill be a Sioux-icide. Yaw! I am meaning idt, oof idt does soundt like a choke. How dit you git here py der camp in?"

The Indian pointed through the cottonwoods, and cast a glance round. The mule and its heavy burden of gold was round a bend of the grove, out of sight at the moment, and he wondered where the gold was. That was what he had come for.

That there was but one man in the camp pleased him.

"Heap fine white man!" he repeated. "White man want to buy?"

He held out something half concealed in his brown palms.

"You tond't pelong here," said the baron. "Oudt vare der odder Inchuns iss you shouldt be, unt noddt here. Who iss inwite you to ender dhis camb, eeny-how? Idt vos noddt me. So you hadt petter walk along pefore mine bistol iss going off in your faces. Do you hear someding like dot?"

"Heap fine white man buy," urged the redskin.

"Vot iss idt you haf godt?" asked the baron. "I am neffer hafing goot luckiness buying oof Inchuns. More as dimes I haf triedt idt, unt idt vos a schnide."

"Heap big Trouble Maker," said the Indian.

The baron became interested.

"Who iss?"

"White man like see big Trouble Maker?"

"You haf got idt?"

The Indian opened his hands and displayed on one brown palm a tiny figure of a crouching redskin, accurately done, even to the paint and feathers.

"Vot iss idt?"

"Trouble totem," explained the redskin.

"Exblanadion dot."

"Pore Injun hide in cottonwoods, near white man talk. White man say him like Trouble Maker. Injun no want um. Mebbysso white man buy um."

"I haf heardt der likes oof dot pefore now," said the baron warily. "One dime I puy him, unt he tond't vork. Meppy oof I puy again, vonce more dimes I am sheated."

But he held out his hand.

As he took the tiny figure from the brown palm of the crafty man before him, old Nomad came crashing into sight, but stopped when he beheld the tableau.

The borderman's rifle swung up, aimed at the painted Sioux, as he supposed the man to be.

"Baron, what in ther name o'—"

"Iss dare trouble oudt on der blains?" asked the baron blandly.

"No, not yit, but——"

"Dare aind't going to be—idt iss vot I haf saidt. So I am looking at——"

"I reckon ye've lost all yer sensibility, baron!" Nomad expostulated. "Any more o' them painted ki-yis round?"

The baron was inspecting the Trouble Maker.

"I aind't seen no more," he answered.

"Waal, ye're ther biggest fool!"

With an angry leap, Nomad romped on into the camp, ready to kick the Sioux out of it and give the baron a piece of his mind.

"See um trouble totem," said the pretended redskin.

With a quick motion, he swung from the baron round to Nomad, who was within a yard of him.

What happened came too fast for words. Both of the Indian's hands got busy at the same instant. With howls of pain, the borderman and the German staggered back, clapping hands to their eyes, their weapons dropping to the ground.

Red pepper in the eyes burns like fire and blinds instantly. That was what Nomad and the baron had received. While they clawed at their blinded eyes and screeched with the intolerable pain, the pretended Sioux scooped their weapons from the earth and swung round.

For an instant he hesitated, tempted to shoot down the helpless men; then he pocketed their revolvers.

"A shot would draw Cody, and that would be plum' foolishness."

He had discovered that the horses were near, and a jump took him to a point where he could see them and the mule. There were packs on their backs. That the mule bore the treasure he knew, from what he had heard when in hiding.

The next instant he had cut the lariat rope the mule was dragging, and was driving the animal toward the river. He did not trouble the others.

On arriving beside the river he whistled. A negro head popped out of the willows. Then the negro leaped into the water and drew forth a big canoe.

"I've got it!" said the driver of the mule. "Now, it's a hurry hustle, while them two fools aire screech-in' an' tearin' round back there. Ye didn't think I could make it in that fool way, but ye see I did. Which is a heap better than straight-out fightin', or shootin' 'em down from ambush. This stuff is now goin' to disappear so completely that Cody can never find it."

He cut the pack straps.

"Boss, is yo' sho' it is de gol'?" asked the negro.

The point of the disguised white man's knife bit through one of the bags of the pack, and gold nuggets began to slide out.

"I was goin' to shoot 'em down, if I had to, before Cody and his bunch got back; but I didn't haf to. Good thing I had that pepper with me, along of my salt an' other foodstuff, you bet. If we'd killed 'em Cody would have tracked us to the end of the earth.

But he won't take so much trouble jes' on account of the gold disappearin'."

"He's a pow'ful bad man to tackle, boss," urged the negro.

Nevertheless, he assisted in loading the canoe with the contents of the mule pack.

Toofer, released, started off, but stopped soon, and began to nip at the grass.

Nomad was the first of the two men in the grove to get his wits.

"Whar is ol' Hide-rack?" he bellowed, pawing round. "He's got my worter bottle tied ter the saddle cantle."

"Unt Toofer, he iss got mine," wailed the baron. "Ach! I am a blindtness. Vare iss Toofer?"

"Come hyar, Hide-rack!" Nomad shouted to his horse.

He felt for his revolver, then pawed the ground in a search for it.

"My rifle is on thet saddle, too; an' I cain't find my pistol, ter shoot up ther air with, and send news ter Buffler. I reckon thet redskin tuck et."

"Unt mine likewise unt also. Ach! mine eyes are turning oudt. Toofer, vare are you? Pring me dose vater pottles kvick, pefore I am deadt. Can't you seen anyt'ing, Nomadt?"

"I'll never see erg'in, I'm thinkin'. My eyes aire plum' gone. Thet Injun devil filled 'em chock-full er pepper, er suthin' like et. They're out, baron—plum' out."

"Me der sameness."

"Ef I ever do see erg'in, I'm goin' ter hunt down thet ki-yi an' finish him—I shore am. Waugh! Did ye ever have anything hurt ye like this?"

"Neffar, so hellup me! Dot Trouble Maker iss der chenuine stuffin's. Idt pring idt kvick. But idt iss not trouble I am vandting; idt iss oxcitement."

"You've got et, baron. Whar is thet hoss? Hide-rack, ef ye don't quit chawin' grass an' come hyar this minute, when I do git my eyes back, ef ever, I'll larrup yer life out. Hide-rack, you come hyar wi' thet worter bottle."

"Vhy dit he do idt?"

"Ther red? Why does a red do anything? Fer pure meanness, o' course."

"Toofer, vhy aind't you coming?"

"Waugh! Baron, I'm——"

"You're feeling petter? Dot is goot. Your voice iss changed."

"A thought has hit me."

"Notting iss hidtting me budt ter paining oof my eyes. Aber, somedimes I am beginning to belief I can see me a liddle again."

"Mebbyso Toofer is gone—thet's what I was thinkin'. An, ef he is, ther gold is gone! Mebbysso this wasn't so much jest sheer meanness as et war a trick ter git the gold. Thet ki-yi seems ter have cut out as soon as he dusted thet pepper inter our eyes. And, like ernough, he tuck Toofer."

The German began to bellow to his mule, commanding the animal to come to him.

Hoofbeats approached.

"Idt iss you, Toofer?"

But it was Hide-rack.

Nomad got the water bottle from the cantle of the saddle, and dashed some of the water into his eyes. Then he held it out.

"Take et, baron. Hyar is worter, an' mebbey et will help ye. I guess we has both been fooled beyond all calc'latin'. I cain't see ef thet mule an' ther gold is gone, but I'm bettin' it. Yer was hankerin' fer trouble, baron!"

The baron dashed water into his eyes.

"Tond't sbeak oof idt."

"A feller gin'rally finds what he's continyul huntin' fer, baron. I'll try some more o' the worter, ef ye're feelin' better."

A scattering volley of musket shots sounded.

"Ther Sioux aire attackin Buffler!" Nomad groaned. "An' hyar we're hung up ez helpless ez er pa'r er blind kittens."

"My eyes iss coming again."

"Waal, mine ain't. Seems lack I'm blinder, an' ther pain is gittin' wuss. Waugh! This worrits me more'n anything ever happened. Thet gold's gone, likely, an' Buffler mixin' wi ther ki-yis, an' needin' me. Baron, I'm plum' crazy."

Dashing water into his eyes, he tore about as if this were literally true.

"Why ther ki-yi didn't finish us I cain't onderstand. He shore had all ther chaine he wanted, baron. An' your confounded foolishness——"

"Tond't sbeak me oudt oof my name," urged the baron. "Could you be more oof a sorriness as I am?"

"Of all ther tomfool things thet ever war witnessed, yourn a while ergo 'd collect all ther premiums. Jes' bercause a ki-yi comes up ter ye an' offers yer a totem yer bergins ter figger on buyin' et. Yer has done et before. An' this hyar ki-yi a Sioux! Baron, you——"

"I am getting madt oof you sbeak idt again. Why cand't you ledt der pasdt be a bygoness? Why cand't you be a sport unt forgidt idt?"

"Thar's more guns goin'! Thet war Cody's Remington cracked thet time. Baron, thar is shore a interestin' mix-up goin' on out thar."

The baron, beginning to see again, began to look about.

"Dot muel iss gone," he admitted.

"An' ther gold war on his back! Ther nater o' ther trick is plain ernough. Nothin' could be plainer, baron, 'ceptin' thet you has played ther plum' idjit. Thet Injun bet you war a fool, an' he won et hands down. He didn't take yer erlong, jes' bercause you showed him thet you aire wuthless. He war after vallyble things only."

"Dot fighdting moosic iss gitting louder yedt," said the baron.

"I has allus had my s'picions thet you war ther

premium fool o' ther United States, an' now I knows et."

"Ledt 'us talk apoudt der vedder," said the baron. "Idt iss a varm day, iss idt nit?"

"Thet Injun c'd see by yer face thet you war a plum' idjit; an' a man what'd go ter sleep, as likely you did, an'——"

"Unt ve are needting some rain."

"Waugh! You're onpossible—you're ther limit! What kin you see? I still cain't see nothin'."

"I can see dot to-morrow idt iss going to be also anodder varm day."

"Wow! Don't tork ter me. Look round an' see ef ye can locate thet red."

"I am nodt seeing him—I cand't seen so far."

"But ye can hear them guns goin'. Baron, sounds lack they're comin' this way! Ther ki-yis is drivin' Buffler back. Wonder ef he has let them white outlaws loose? Seems as though I hear more rifles crackin'."

"Eenyhow, der noises iss coming nearer."

"Waal, ef them renegades has been let loose, and turns on Buffler in ther end, they'll come lookin' fer ther gold fust thing."

"AFTER all, idt may be a luckiness dot idt iss gone," said the baron, grasping at any straw that might tend to mitigate his extreme act of indiscretion. "Dhey cannodt findt idt, oof idt iss nodt to be foundt."

"Thet will help us a lot, won't et? Your philosorphy wanders in sech circles thet et tangles etself like er rope. Come over hyar, an' see ef ye cain't do nuthin' fer my eyes with thet worter bottle. A blind bat hangin' in er black cave could see more'n I can."

The baron, stung with pain still, and nearly as blind as the borderman, did what he could.

And all the time the Indian yelling and the rifle shots sounded closer.

CHAPTER III.

BUFFALO BILL'S DILEMMA.

Buffalo Bill had ridden forth with Pawnee, Little Cayuse, the Brandons, and Ruff Reynolds' bunch of outlaws, the latter bound, in the hope of securing a conference with Red Hand, which would result in letting him pass peaceably through the territory of the Buffalo Killer Sioux.

He did not want to fight, handicapped as he was with more than a dozen prisoners and the mule cargo of gold nuggets, the latter the rightful property of the Brandons.

There were two of the Brandons, brother and sister, both young and inexperienced. They were the children of a man who for a number of years had been the Black Chief of the Buffalo Killers, as that branch of the great Sioux nation was known.

Originally they had come into this wild part of the West in search of their father, not knowing that he had become an Indian chief; all they knew then was

that he had mysteriously disappeared after starting for the gold fields of the Black Hills with a man named Mason, who afterward became a border whisky runner under the name of Morgan, and had with him in this nefarious trade the negro, Rastus Grimesby.

As they learned, Morgan had attacked their father and had struck him on the head with a hatchet, then chucked him into the river, thinking him dead, with the ultimate result that, though the elder Brandon escaped, he had lost his memory of the past, and, joining the Indians, continued to live with them.

This was the story that Brandon himself told, when he was found sick of an injury in the Sioux village.

They had induced him to return to his Eastern home. But there he had recalled the history of the cache of gold, and had set out to get it, and had died in the Sioux village, near which he was "buried"—if that term may be used—with Sioux honors, on the burial scaffold devoted to the bodies of dead Sioux chieftains.

Though all this has been more than hinted at in the preceding pages, it may be well to repeat it more concisely here, to give the reader an accurate understanding of the situation as it was when this story opened.

How the gold had been found by the negro, and then had been secured by Buffalo Bill, has been shown perhaps with sufficient clearness.

Buffalo Bill's difficult task, therefore, when he went forth to meet the threatening warriors under Red Hand was to secure an untroubled passage through the Sioux territory.

In this he failed utterly.

Red Hand and his braves were keen-sighted, and they already possessed a good deal of accurate information concerning the recent acts of the great scout and his party. They saw that two-thirds of the men under the scout seemed to be helpless. So, instead of responding to his advances, they began an attack.

The thing that Buffalo Bill had dreaded, yet which he had seen, and could see now, no way to avoid, came to pass.

He had to release his prisoners, put weapons in their hands, and tell them to fight for their lives.

Ruff Reynolds' ruffians were fighters—there was no doubt about that—and they gave the redskins such a taste of their quality that Red Hand and his braves were driven back, before the cottonwood grove was gained.

Then, of course, the expected happened.

Ruff's men, bunched, under his leadership, drew off to one side as soon as the Sioux swung into a disorderly retreat, and threatened to attack Buffalo Bill and his men.

The scout's force effected a safe retreat into the cottonwoods, however, without being actually attacked; for, strong in numbers as they were, Ruff's renegades really feared to crowd such fighting men.

But, believing that the gold was there, they did not

intend to leave until they had secured it, by fighting or in some other manner.

"If we ever get through with this gold, necarnis, it will be a miracle," Pawnee was saying, as the edge of the cottonwood grove was reached. "Still, you're a man that I regularly expect to see turn miracles; so there is hope."

Riding with him were the Brandons—Jack Brandon, a blue-eyed young athlete, without experience, but with good fighting stuff in him; and his sister, Louise, called Lou, who was attired and rode like a man. And a very good-looking young man she made, too, in appearance a slim, trim young warrior, garbed in buckskin clothing, with a rifle in her hand and her small waist zoned with a cartridge belt that supported a good revolver.

"If we get through with our lives," she said to Pawnee, "that is all I am asking now."

• "Yes, the gold will have to go," Jack Brandon admitted. "We can't ask any men to take such risks for it."

They came plunging through the fringing trees into the camp, and the words were heard by Nomad.

"Waugh!" he yelled. "It's gone!"

He stared at them as if he could not see, his eyes red as fire, and clutching his long rifle.

"The gold's gone!" he yelled again. "Ther baron hyar has made a bigger fool of himself than even nater meant he sh'd be, and went——"

"Sbeak idt easy!" the baron begged, scrubbing at his eyes, to get them open, so that he could see the cavalcade that came plunging into the camp.

Buffalo Bill was lingering on the edge of the grove with Little Cayuse, to determine what action the outlaws intended. So the Brandons were at the moment the only ones with Pawnee.

"What's the trouble here, old Diamond?" Pawnee demanded. "What's the matter with your eyes?"

"They're out!" Nomad snapped. "And ther baron is——"

"Idt vos nodt me," gurgled the baron. "Idt vos der Trouple Maker, unt der——"

"You war reesponsible!" charged Nomad. "Ef et hadn't been fer you, thet Sioux wouldn't got inter ther camp in ther fust place, and then ther red pepper——"

"Idt vos der Trouple Maker," avowed the baron. "Here he iss. I findt him by der groundt on yoost now."

He held up the tiny painted and feathered figure of an Indian, the body and head carved out of soft limestone.

Pawnee Bill threw a leg over the saddle and slipped hastily from the back of Chick-Chick.

"Red pepper?" he said. "In your eyes? Here, let us see what we can do for you. And let the explanations come afterward. It's plain as a house afire that you've run into something that has put you out of the game."

Unhooking his canteen, he began to use its contents, giving his attention to Nomad at first, as the old bor-

derman seemed in the worse condition. In fact, old Nomad was still so blind that he could not even see Pawnee Bill when the latter stood before him.

The Brandons were asking questions, but for a little while they got scant information.

Then the girl discovered that Toofer was not with Hide-rack, the trapper's rawboned horse.

"Where is the mule?" she queried.

"Gone—mit der gelt!" the baron groaned.

"I heard Nomad say the gold was gone, but I——"

"Der Sioux led der muel away mit idt on his pack."

"Our crowd licked, I reckon," observed Nomad, fighting with the pain in his eyes, but unable to extinguish his curiosity and anxiety.

"With the help of Ruff and his scoundrels, we put it over the ki-yis, old man; but now it looks as though we are going to have to fight Ruff's crowd," Pawnee answered.

"Ther pizen ombrays!"

"They're back there, powwowing, trying to find out if they've got the sand to make the tackle. They want that gold."

"Which et ain't hyar now, as I told ye."

"I heard you say that; and, as soon as you're a bit more comfortable, I am going to ask you to explain about it."

"'Twar ther baron thet——"

"I heard you say that, too. The baron got about as much of that pepper, or whatever it was, as you did. So, if he made any mistake, he seems to be paying for it. Some one came into the camp and threw pepper in your eyes, then robbed you of the gold. Sounds like a mighty queer game for a ki-yi to play. Now, if it had been one of Ruff's men! But right at that time they were with us, you know. So, old Diamond, you've got me lost in the fog. But we'll not talk about it further until you're out of this pain."

"I reckon I ain't never goin' ter see erg'in, Pawnee."

"Oh, yes, you will—and in a short time. Your eyes will be all ready for business, if Ruff's bunch of crooks collect enough courage for a tackle."

When Buffalo Bill came in, with Cayuse left on guard at the edge of the grove, Nomad and the baron had reached the state of seeing, and were in a frame of mind to tell their story with some degree of clearness. It was an amazing recital, and reflected no credit on the baron.

He tried to cover his confusion by displaying the Trouble Maker, which in his haste the supposed Indian had left. It had bewitched him, he said.

"When I seen dot Troupe Maker," he declared, "I haf a graziness to own idt. So idt vos dot der Inchun make sooch a monkey-doodle pitzness mit me. Budt, py yiminy, oof I seen him again I vill make mince-meadt oudt oof dot retskin."

"So you went hunting for trouble again, pard?" said the scout quietly.

"Yaw; unt idt foundt me. Unt now der gelt iss gone, unt der muel iss gone likewise."

There was a sheepish look on the face of the baron.

Together with his inflamed eyes, it made him an object of pity. Buffalo Bill had no desire to be hard on him; he had troubles enough of his own, without quarreling with a pard.

"Pawnee," he requested, "I'd like to have you slip out toward the river and see if you can locate Toofer. Cayuse will keep an eye on Ruff's crowd. I suppose," he added, turning to Nomad, "that the Sioux who led the mule away went in the direction of the river?"

"Shorely, er ye'd 'a' seen him. As fer me, I warn't at ther time seein' anything but red streaks o' fire. Me an' ther baron war jes' yelpin' an' pawin' ther air."

Pawnee departed hastily in the direction of the river.

"You're sure," said the scout to Nomad, "that the man who double-crossed the baron was an Indian, and a Sioux?"

"He had all the earmarks, Buffler. What I am figgerin', as soon as I can think, is thet one o' ther Sioux tuck advantage of yer powwowin' out thar ter turn ther trick; him havin' diskivered thet jes' two fools, like me an' ther baron, aire all thet is left ter gyard ther treasure. Ther only other horn o' ther dilemmer is thet this hyar smart Sioux war one o' ther Sioux band what has lately been trailin' round after Blue Wolf, they bein', as ye may say, in rebellion erg'inst Red Hand, and keepin' erway frum his crowd."

"That may be the truth of it," piped up Jack Brandon, immensely interested; for the loss of the treasure failed to have the color of a joke for him. "Blue Wolf was left behind, you know, with his following."

The Brandons, having been virtually prisoners of Blue Wolf and his braves not so long before, felt that they were pretty well acquainted with him. Mention of him usually brought a flush to the girl's face; for Blue Wolf had sought to make love to her in the headlong Indian fashion, telling her that she was the white prairie flower that he had long desired to bloom in his lodge.

The great scout did not conceal the fact that he was puzzled by what during his absence had occurred in the camp.

"It wasn't like an Indian," he objected. "The whole affair has the color of the act of a white man."

"Budt idt vos an Inchun," said the baron.

"Are you sure, Nomad," the scout asked, "that it was a Sioux?"

"I didn't have time ter size him up much, an' thet is a fact, Buffler. About as soon as I sighted him, and war openin' with a battery o' questions, I war put erway fer good wi' thet red-hot pepper in my eyes. But ef head feathers and er load o' Injun paint, all arranged Sioux fashion, with et ceterys of moccasins, blanket, an' sich like, makes a Sioux, he war all to ther good. He cert'inly looked et."

"Unt he dalked idt," added the baron, "dabbing at his eyes with pudgy knuckles. 'I am leafing idt to No-madt oof he ditn't dalk yoost like a Inchun.'"

"Torked white man's English like an Injun—yes, I admits thet he did. But I see what ye're hintin' at, Buffler. Et is yore idee thet mebbys this hyar Injun

war er white man playin' as fer suckers. Waal," he added slowly and thoughtfully, "ef so, we shore swallered ther bait—hook, bob, line, an' sinker! An' ef et is so, I war fooled jes' as much as ther baron."

Pawnee returned hurriedly. And he brought Toofer with him.

"The rascal was right round the corner of the grove, up to his eyes in grass," he said. "But I want you to notice that the thief took the pack, as well as the gold. He skinned the mule of everything except the bridle and lariat."

"You noticed the direction of the trail?"

"Toofer's tracks came from the direction of the river. I didn't back-track him. I suppose we'll find that the thief had a pony out there, to which he transferred his loot, and then cut out."

"We'll strike that trail as soon as it is safe to do so," said the scout.

"I think I'd like to prospect out that way, with your permission, to see what really did happen," said Jack Brandon.

"Look out that you don't run into a trap, then," the scout warned.

"Better not go, Jack," urged the girl. "The gold isn't worth the risk."

But young Brandon galloped out toward the river.

Buffalo Bill rejoined the watching Piute, in the edge of the grove that overlooked the level plains.

"Tinhorn hangin' round," said Little Cayuse. "Sioux, he leave pronto."

Far off in a dust cloud were the Sioux, apparently retreating toward their village. Near by were Ruff Reynolds' men, still drawn close together.

"A conference is on there," said the scout, turning his binoculars on the ruffians. "But they'll not attack us while we hold this cottonwood grove."

"What um Pa-e-has-ka do now?" asked the Piute.

"Cayuse," the scout smiled, "I'm like the man that had hold of the bear. Perhaps you never heard that little story: The man followed a bear into a cave, and tried to drag it out. While he was doing it another bear appeared, blocking the entrance of the cave. If the man retreated the bear in the entrance would get him; and if he didn't retreat the bear inside the cave would get him."

The Piute looked at the great scout with shining eyes.

"That man not Pa-e-has-ka?" he said.

"No."

"If that man be Pa-e-has-ka, both bears be dead."

"You flatter me, Cayuse. The gold is gone—and it seems to be up to us to find it. Perhaps the Sioux under Red Hand have it, and that is the real reason they are retreating. If we follow the gold we are advancing on one bear; while the other bear, Ruff's outlaws, will be threatening us at the rear."

"Pa-e-has-ka heap big chief," said the Piute.

"However that is, Cayuse, it warms the cockles of my heart to know that you have such faith in me."

"Pawnee heap big chief, too."

"That's so; Pawnee Bill is right there with the goods. I'll not dispute you there."

"Mebbyso him big job, Pa-e-has-ka; but Pa-e-has-ka can do."

Buffalo Bill let his eyes flicker over the plains, the distant Indians, and the nearer bunch of outlaws.

"You hearten me, Cayuse. Anyhow, we've got to try it. And when it comes to delivering the goods, I know a young redskin named Little Cayuse who can be expected to do his full share of whatever is handed out to him."

"Ai."

CHAPTER IV.

RUFF AND HIS RUFFIANS.

The presence of the outlaws kept Buffalo Bill from making more than the beginning of a search for the missing gold.

While the baron and Nomad lay in the camp, jaw-whacking each other over what had occurred, and the manner of its occurrence, and Little Cayuse stood guard in the grove at the point where he had a good view of the plains, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee, with the Brandons, took up the trail of the mule, and followed it to the river.

There the trail ended, so far as the gold was concerned; though Toofer, it could be seen, had strayed along, after being released, and had leisurely cropped the grass, unmindful of the fact that the treasure he had carried had been lifted from his back.

Though Toofer had been led down to the edge of the water, and even into it, no other animal tracks were to be found; proof, apparently, that if a horse had been used for the further transportation of the treasure it had stood in the stream while the load was being placed on it.

In the sand, close by the water, some moccasin tracks were found, few in number, however.

The Sioux used a boat, perhaps," suggested Buffalo Bill. "I say Sioux—though the earmarks on all this work are those of a white man. And if he used a boat—"

He looked across the little stream.

"Maybe he went over, and maybe not," said Pawnee. "He could have gone up or down, with the chances in favor of down, as being the easiest. That's the way it looks to me."

"There is no good hiding ground down the river," Buffalo Bill objected; "but plenty of it up; especially after the Staghorn is reached. If he went upstream, and takes the Staghorn fork, he will be able to worry us."

They were thinking of swimming the river, to push an investigation on the farther side, when Cayuse's whoop summoned them back to the camp.

"Der outlaws," the baron reported, "are moofing roundt, mit der itea oof some addacks oop der sleeps. I am sdaying py der camp in vhide Nomadt has gone

to choin der Biute. Idt iss some more oof der vork oof der Trouple Maker."

He held up the image.

"Chuck that!" commanded Pawnee. "Throw it in the camp fire, and get rid of it, before it sets you crazy again."

The baron slipped it into his pocket with a sheepish grin.

"I am walueing idt vor der inexperience vot I haf gained py idt," he explained. He wriggled uncomfortably. "Dot iss vhy I am keeping him. Budt vot iss der use to sbeak apoudt idt?"

Pawnee Bill laughed.

"Chuck it," he urged again.

"Led us talk apoudt der vedder," said the baron.

"You're making a fool of yourself with that Indian plaything, baron," said the scout, "and I hate to have my pards act that way. Whenever you connect up with anything that promises to be a trouble maker you get bats in your garret. How many times is it that you have bought trouble charms?"

"Fordy or sixdy," the baron confessed, as red in the face as a schoolboy caught raiding an orchard. "Budt, usually, dey haf vorked."

"They brought trouble? That's what you mean?"

"Yaw. Unt dhis: Yoost so soon as I seen him der troupleomeness he gommences to sbin roundt. Nomadt unt me ve gedt der ret bepper ower eyes in, unt der gelt idt iss gone so kvick dot idt make ower headts sbin roundt, too. Unt idt iss nodd finished yedt."

"Better burn it," urged the scout; "you'll get all the trouble you can want before we're through with this trail, without hunting for it."

"You are like Nomadt—you tond't understand him," the baron expostulated. "Idt iss nodd der trouple alone vot I am seeking, budt der oxcitement."

"Without which life is not worth living—for you," laughed Pawnee, highly amused and able to enjoy a laugh in spite of the serious situation.

"Yaw! Pesites," he urged, "I like to keeb dhis liddle Inchun veller for some guriosity. I vill use idt for dot, unt nodd for making trouples, oof idt suidt you petter."

"I don't like you to think you must become a trouble hunter," said the scout; "and——"

"Pa-e-has-ka!"

The Piute was calling; and the scout went on, with Pawnee, to ascertain the meaning.

"Ruff's runnygates," explained Nomad, when the two scouts had reached the border of the grove, "aire aidgin' up this way. You kin see Ruff, out in front er ther bunch; an' now he's makin' signs. Wants a confab, I reckon; thet's why I told Cayuse ter send a yelp to ye."

Ruff Reynolds detached himself from his men and came riding toward the grove.

Nomad covered him with a rifle.

"Consarn his picter," he breathed, "I'd like ter drill him; and I'll do et, Buffler, ef yer gives ther word."

The scout pushed the rifle aside.

"We'll see what he has to say."

When the outlaw had advanced halfway to the grove he halted, and taking off his coat swung it round his head.

"New kind er white rag," Nomad grunted. "Ef yer go out thar, Buffler, ter tork ter him, I sets hyar wi' finger on trigger an' rifle sighted on him, ready ter let go; you kin tell him so, soon's you meet him. I don't trust thet villyun as fur as ye c'd sling a steer by ther tail."

Nevertheless, Buffalo Bill returned to the camp, got his horse, Bear Paw, and rode forth to meet the man who had so recently been his prisoner.

"I has got the whip hand, Cody," said Ruff, when they met. "Ye can see that."

"You'll pardon my dullness," returned the scout, "when I admit that so far I hadn't discovered it. But for the sake of the argument, I'll admit that you may think so."

Ruff frowned and twisted uneasily on the back of his horse.

"I've got thirteen men," he threatened, "and you've got jes' five."

"You don't count in the Brandons, I see."

"Aire they wuth it? An' one is a gal. T'other is no more than a boy; and as fer fightin', ye might as well count in whatever rabbits aire happenin' at this minute to be hidin' in yer camp. You know that. So you've got jes' five men."

"What then?"

"Waal, it's the gold. I s'pose you've guessed it. Hand over the gold, and we p'int east'rd, and makes ye no trouble whatever."

"If not?"

"Then," said Ruff, his voice hardening, "we takes et."

It was clear that its absence from the camp was as yet wholly unknown to Ruff and his men.

"If the gold was mine," said the scout, "I might think about it; I say I might—though I reckon I wouldn't. But the gold isn't mine."

"That's too fine a p'int fer me, Cody. Anyway, aire ye goin' ter give it up, er otherwise?"

"Otherwise."

"You know what it means?" Ruff threatened.

"That some of your men will be killed—if you attack us."

"Five men cain't hold out ag'inst the crowd that's backin' me. I needn't tell ye thet we figger we know suthin' erbout fightin'; you considered that we did, when you turned us ag'inst ther Sioux. Better think erbout it, Cody."

"I have done all the thinking that I intend to; and if that is all you have got to say, you've wasted your time and mine, asking me out here."

Ruff's red face paled with anger, and his eyes glittered.

"That's yer answer?"

Buffalo Bill laughed scornfully, seeing the ruffian's rage.

"You can call it that," he said.

"An' that's ther message I'm ter take back ter the boys?" said Ruff, loath to give over his hope that the gold would be surrendered without trouble.

"You might add that we are well armed, have plenty of ammunition, are in good position; and that before they can take the gold from us half of them, or two-thirds of them, will be dead."

Ruff twisted again uneasily.

"I ain't sayin' you can't fight, Cody—I know ye!" he admitted. "But is it wuth it to you? Hadn't ye better make friends with us? Suppose the Sioux tackle ye ag'in—and it may happen before you can git through hyar; you'll be needin' good men like mine to help ye out. Better think of that, Cody," he argued.

"Whenever your crowd goes with me again every man jack will be my prisoner; otherwise, I don't think we could stand the close association. We can't work together, Ruff. I couldn't trust you."

"So thar is nothin' doin'?" said the outlaw.

"Not in that line, Ruff. But if you'll take my advice, you and the fellows with you will make haste to get out of the territory bossed over by Red Hand. He isn't going to take his defeat to-day kindly; and he will try to make things hot for you."

"And you?"

"You don't have any call to worry about me, or those with me. Better take my advice, Ruff, and ride east as fast as you can. You're free men now—against my will. I can't help that. But you'd better——"

"We'll flicker east'rd," said Ruff, "after we git that gold—not before. "He began to pull his horse round. "If you don't think it——"

Kicking the horse into motion, he rode away.

Nomad was fuming when Buffalo Bill returned to the cottonwoods.

"Buffer, I'm shore sore on thet," he admitted; "you war within techin' distance o' thet scallywag, and didn't bring 'im back with ye. With Ruff in our grip we c'd 'a' confabbed with them fellers erbout right. Why didn't ye?"

"Nomad," said the scout, "I never violate the peace flag, even if it is only the ragged coat of a scoundrel."

"They will make their attack in the night," guessed Pawnee Bill, when Cody had delivered the news; "it's a safe gamble, seems to me, that they will surround the camp then and try to rush us."

"If we are here!"

"You don't intend to be here?"

"Hardly. We'll look into the matter of this queer gold trail; and it may lead us far before dark comes down. Anyway, we'll be in another camp before night-fall."

To carry this out, and at the same time keep the outlaws deceived, Buffalo Bill left Little Cayuse in the edge of the grove, where, he was instructed, he was to show himself at intervals; then led the rest of the party to the river.

The tall cottonwoods concealing the stream and its shores at that point from the view of any one on the

plains, the crossing of the river, by swimming the animals over, was readily accomplished.

But on the other shore no sign was found.

"A boat was used," said the scout, when this point had been settled. "I rather feared that, from the first."

"And a canoe trail," remarked Pawnee, "is writ in water. The correct thing would be to divide our force, if we dared to, and make a search both up and downstream."

"The river is shallow here, and not very swift," argued the scout; "so the thief might have gone along rapidly, by poling, even if he went upstream."

They searched for marks of the pole.

Though none was found, the scout adhered to his belief that the thief had gone upstream.

"On the Staghorn branch," he urged, "there are plenty of hiding places; and none of consequence downstream. So I declare for the upstream trail. It seems too bad to back-track here; but we can't go on without that gold."

"I'd prefer it," said the girl, "to the risk that you may have to run. And perhaps in the end it cannot be located. If a Sioux took it, he may be even now in the Sioux village."

"The thief used the river; and the village of Red Hand lies straight away from it."

However, the scout moved no more than two or three miles up the stream before he went into camp.

Before that time came he had dropped Nomad back to notify the Piute, so that as darkness fell the latter could quietly leave the cottonwoods and join the party.

Darkness comes swiftly on the high plains and in the Western mountains; and, with the day ended, night shut in with its usual quickness, as Cayuse and Nomad rejoined their friends.

"Ruff's runnygates has sunk out er sight inter ther grass, like snakes—thet war ther condition as we stole erway," Nomad reported. "I'd give suthin' handsome ter be thar when they rushes ther camp and finds et empty as a las' year's bird's nest. Waugh! So I would."

Yet no one believed that even such a disappointment would cause the outlaws to give up the gold trail. Their appetites whetted for treasure, they would pursue it to the bitter end.

CHAPTER V.

BILL GARNER'S HIDE-OUT.

In Bill Garner, Buffalo Bill had a clever man to deal with.

Having successfully flimflammed the baron, and blinded both him and old Nomad, Garner felt that the game was almost as good as won, as he led Toofer to the river, and with the help of Rastus Grimesby transferred the treasure of nuggets from the back of the mule to the big canoe.

The explanation of how the negro had secured the

canoe harks back to the time when the negro was in the pay of the whisky dealer called Morgan. Morgan's cabin had been on the banks of the Missouri, a few miles farther down; and the canoe, which had been Morgan's, had been concealed by the black, for future use, after Morgan's death. He had told Garner about it; and had been sent to get it the evening before, while Garner hung round Buffalo Bill's camp, watching for an opportunity, and studying how to get his hands on the treasure.

"If a feller," said Garner, "wants ter git away from a place in a canoe in a hurry, which way would he go, upstream, or down?"

"He'd go down, boss," said Rastus, rolling his eyes wonderingly.

"Any man would think so?"

"He sho' would."

"Then we goes in the other direction, so's to fool Cody more complete. Besides, thar's better hidin' ground up the river. You been along the Staghorn?"

"Ain' no place roun' hyuh wha' I ain' been," Rastus boasted.

"Waal, thar's hidin' places up the Staghorn whar I reckon even you hain't been. Now you take this paddle, while I handle the other'n, and we uses all the muscle we've got, gittin' away from hyar."

The gunwale was awash, the canoe being much overloaded; but under the propulsion of the skillfully wielded paddles, the canoe made good progress, breasting the current, while back in the camp of the scout Nomad and the baron were blinded and roaring with pain.

The canoe turned into the mouth of the Staghorn before nightfall. By this time the paddle wielders were dead tired, and hungry. But Garner would not put ashore. Instead, he weighted a stone, and threw it out at the end of a rope as an anchor; and so they rested while they ate.

Until midnight they fought the Staghorn, which was swift in places.

"Boss, I'm daid," the darky pleaded; "I cain't pull an'er stroke, if all dat gol' is los'."

"A dozen more will bring us to the spot I've been reachin' out fer," said Garner. "You see that black bluff, right ahead, on the shore thar? Waal, it's thar."

They paddled wearily up to it.

"You goin' asho' now, I expec'?"

"Not on your tintype. We ain't never goin' ashore."

"Whoo! Man, what yo' talkin' 'bout? I cain't pull dis boat no mo'."

"You can swim? An' if you can't swim, you can sink; which will answer nearly as well."

"You done wuk so hard you losin' yo' haid now," the darky declared.

The nose of the canoe bumped lightly against the bluff, which loomed over them in the darkness like the wall of a building.

"We're goin' to sink the canoe," said Garner; "and when she goes down we're goin' down with her."

The negro dropped his paddle in the canoe.

"I'se goin' tuh git out an' walk, if you make dat kin' er crazy talk," he declared, frightened.

Garner laughed.

"I thought it'd skeer you. But, see hyar, I'm meanin' it, too. You don't understand; so I'm goin' to explain a bit. Right under the nose of this bluff, and under the water, is a hole big enough for a man to crawl through; and that hole is one entrance to a cave. It's a big cave—jes' how big I don't know; it's got a dozen ends, I reckon, and I ain't never been to but two or three of 'em. One of them ends that I know about is farther down the river; but I filled it in some years ago, and now thar is little trees an' bushes growin' on it. Another end is a pool of water that I call the suck hole; but thar ain't no use to explain about that now.

"This hyar cave has been knowed of by the Injuns—some of 'em—from 'way back. It was revealed to me by an Injun. I was loafin' round the Staghorn, some years ago, lookin' fer gold; and I comes on this Injun, who had been hurt bad by a fall from a cliff.

"I done what I could fer him, and he told me erbout the cave. He was a Blackfoot, and was afraid of the Sioux, what war huntin' in the Staghorn at that time. So I carried him into the cave, by that entrance which is now stopped up.

"I nussed him up in thar, an' he got well. Him takin' a likin' to me on account of that, he told me all he knowed about the cave, and piloted me round. Thar's a heap o' queer things erbout it, which I ain't got time to tell ye about now.

"As queer as any, you'll p'r'aps think, is the water entrance, which is now almost right under us. That's why we're goin' to sink the canoe right hyar. Let the water come into it and the gold nuggets will hold it down, onct it strikes bottom, jes' the same as a load of rocks would.

"As fer you an' me—we jines hands and dives, when she goes under, and I pulls you into that hole. We swim two or three yards, and then we rises; and when we rises we aire in the cave. Do you ketch on?"

The negro was breathing heavily and staring at the black cliff, with half-frightened glances round at the inclosing gloom.

"I doan' lack de sound of hit," he admitted. "S'pose we doan't hit dat hole what is down dar?"

"I've connected up with it more than a dozen times, 'thout missin' it onct; so ye needn't worry on that account."

"An' de gol'?"

"We can leave it in the canoe, at the bottom of the river; er drag it into the cave, usin' that rope that is hyar. That would take some swimmin' an' divin', but we c'd easy do it. It might be a good idea; fer the river hyar ain't deep, and the canoe might be seen by any one passin' over it. But them is details fer later consideration. The question now is, aire ye ready to try with me fer that water entrance, an' sink the canoe?"

Rastus hesitated. A thought of tackling the unknown alarmed him; and he did not entirely trust Garner.

"Couldn't we go asho' somewha', an' hide out in de bresh?" he asked.

"Didn't I say we ain't never goin' ashore? We're goin' to hide in this cave till Cody gits tired huntin' fer us an' leaves the country. Then we're goin' ter lift the canoe, put the nugget bags into it, and drift down river, hidin' in the willers in the daytime, and movin' on only at night. I've got this cave provisioned with jerked meat an' a few other things; so we won't need ever to set foot on the ground, if we don't want to. And if we don't set foot on the ground, will you tell me how Willyum F. Cody, or any other man alive, is ever goin' to track us down?"

"Ye see, I've thought all this out," he added; "seen jes' how we c'd work it, and laid this plan, when you an' me j'ined forces to git the stuff out of Cody's hands. You foller my lead, an' you'll w'ar diamonds. Cody can't find a water trail any more than any other man; and when the canoe is sunk, the water trail ends, anyhow. A bloodhound couldn't locate us, so long as we keep our feet off the ground."

"Hit sho' sounds lack yo' has got de ingreediments o' safety mighty well mixed," Rastus admitted. "Still, I is hesitatin'——"

"Waal, I ain't. We're goin' to sink this canoe—right now. When she goes down, you dive, d'ye understand?"

He threw himself against the side of the canoe, forcing it under water; and as it filled it went down, carrying the two men with it, the negro gulping in fright.

As he struck out instinctively, to keep himself from drowning, one of his hands was caught by the white man, who began to pull him along under the water.

Rastus used the other hand in swimming, as he was towed along; and when it seemed that his lungs would burst if he did not rise to breathe, he was pulled upward.

As his head popped out of the water, and he took in a deep breath, he found that he was in total darkness.

"This way," panted Garner. "'Twan't so bad, eh? You jes, obey me, and you'll allus come through all right. We're in the cave now, and right agin' the bank."

He drew the negro against it.

"Now ye can climb out. We're above the level o' the river now; fer, of course, this cave water and that in the river connectin' their level is the same."

As Rastus scrambled up, puffing, Bill Garner followed him.

"We'll have a light, soon's my hands aire dry enough to handle matches. I has got some in a metal box right clus by. How're ye feelin'?"

Wet and shivering, the negro sank down.

"Woof!" he exploded. "I is somewha', but I dunno wha' I is. Dis is a cave, I reckon; but I done feel lack

I had been bu'ied. Mas Garner, you is sho' you kin git out uh hit when yo' wants to?"

Garner laughed, shook the water from his hands, tried to dry them on the sandy floor, and shuffled over to the stone shelf where he kept his matches. A minute later he had a light going—a tallow dip, which he set on the shelf.

Rastus Grimesby looked round. Over his head was a limestone roof. Under him was a sandy floor, which margined a black pool. And leading off from the room in which he crouched were several dark galleries, leading into the unknown.

"How d'ye like it?" asked Garner.

"De man what foun' dis hyuh in de fus' place mus' 'a' been a feesh," said the negro.

"How it was found in the fust place is a little bit o' hist'ry leadin' so fur back that even my Blackfoot friend didn't know erbout it. It is the neatest hide-out, though, that you ever connected with, ain't it, now?"

"It sho' is," Rastus confessed.

"I thought so. I've found it so, fer five years an' more. Sence we're likely to be pards fer a time, I don't mind admittin' that I've laid snug an' safe hyar more times than a dozen while sheriffs an' the like, not to mention redskins, was huntin' fer me; and I hain't never been smoked out o' this hole yit."

The negro stared at him.

"You has been wukkin' de road-agent trade?"

"I have—fer more than five years. You remember when the stage to Crescent Butte was shot up, three years ago come next April? Waal, it was me done it. I got fifteen hundred dollars out o' that. Like a fool, I pirouted over to Mogollon, to spend that wad; got chased, lost the most of it, and had to hit these hills fer safety, in the end. Thar's other times I c'd mention. But——"

He moved to another shelf, and brought out a store of jerked venison.

"This cave is dry, in spite o' that water," he said; "and you'll find this meat all right; set yer jaws to workin'. While we eat, I'll do some thinkin'. In a minute er so I'm goin' to swim out and see how that canoe is layin'. What's yer idee about leavin' the nuggets thar, or bringin' 'em in hyar? If we fetch 'em into the cave, we've got to weight the canoe with rocks, to hold 'er down?"

Rastus was not yet capable of thinking clearly on any subject. So he tackled the meat, with an appetite that was excellent, for he had fasted long.

But Garner, as soon as he had stayed his stomach, swam out through the water entrance, to make sure that the canoe and its load of treasure had sunk to the bottom all right.

"It's canted some," he said, when he returned; "and it ain't layin' jes' whar I'd like it. I got a rope in hyar, and thar is one tied to the canoe. We can fasten the canoe with one; and haul them buckskin bags in hyar with the other. The night is dark as a stack o' black cats outside, and I know Cody ain't in miles of

this spot. So it will be easy. We'll tackle it as soon as you've rested up a bit."

He attacked some of the jerked meat, and sat down, to talk the thing over.

An hour later they began the work of transferring the bags of nuggets to the cave, and dragging the canoe closer to the bluff, where it was not so likely to be noticed by any one passing up or down the stream.

Long before the bags were in the cave, the Indian paint, that Garner had believed would withstand any wetting, had been washed from his face and body.

"Waal, I has got more," he said, "and I don't need it, nohow; right hyar in the cave is a-plenty, which I keeps fer purposes o' disguise. When I helt up the stage on the Jimtown trail, two years ago, I was togged out like a Ute; and the sheriff o' El Cajon County ain't through combin' over the Ute village yit, huntin' fer the Ute buck that done it. Injun paint comes mighty handy at times, Rastus."

He arose again.

"Now I'm goin' out onct more, t' make cert'in that old canoe is layin' jest right; then you an' me is goin' to git our beauty sleep, so's to be ready fer any sort o' tackle that Cody may see fit to try, if he ever smells his way up the river so fur as this."

But when he went out this time he made a slip. The cargo of stone now holding the canoe on the bottom shifted, as he pulled and tugged at it under water, and the canoe rose to the surface, in spite of his efforts to keep it down.

He came to the surface of the river as the overturned canoe floated away, his strength spent, expelled the air with which his lungs were bursting, and tried to recover it; but in his exhausted condition failed. The swift current beyond caught it, and whisked it away.

"Wow!" he gasped. "No use drowndin' myself tryin' to ketch it, fer I can't; and I shore ain't goin' to set foot on land."

Wearily he turned about, the canoe being now lost in the darkness, swam heavily against the stream to the spot with which he was so familiar; and there, diving, he regained the cave.

When he came up inside and sought the shore, he was so weak that he could hardly crawl out on the sand; and for a minute or so was too weak to talk.

But by and by he explained, giving Rastus his second fright that night.

"I don't know as it makes much difference," Garner urged; "only, we'll want it when we're ready to float out of this. If it ain't to be found along the river, then we can make a raft, or steal a canoe from some redskin."

"Buffalo Bill will sho' find hit!" Rastus declared.

"Waal, s'pose he does? I've thought of that; and I've asked myself, what if he does? How is that goin' to help him? Thar is the canoe, say, which he sees floatin', or mebbys it is hung up in a bunch of willers; and he grips onto it. But how is that goin' to help him, or hurt us?"

Rastus twisted his bare black toes in the sand—he had taken off his soaked shoes—and considered this.

"'Tain' goin' tuh he'p him none, as I can see. Findin' de canoe ain' de same as findin' dis hyuh cave."

"It ain't. We can lay as snug hyar as groundhogs, and let him v'y'age up and down the river in that canoe as much as he pleases. Later, when the time comes, we can make a raft, and git out o' this at our pleasure."

Still, the unexpected loss of the canoe troubled him, and clouded his sleep when he lay down for the "forty winks" he meant to get before the coming of day.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INDIAN SEEN IN THE RIVER.

Buffalo Bill found the canoe two days later. Bottom side up, it had grounded on a sand bar, near the middle of the little river, and lay clearly revealed. Caught under a thwart was a paddle; and at the stern of the canoe was a line.

Pawnee Bill was with him at the time, and they were mounted.

Swimming Bear Paw out to the bar, the scout tied an end of the line to the horn of his saddle, and brought the canoe ashore. When it was drawn out of the water, and emptied, the paddle was discovered.

"Sioux make," said Pawnee, looking it over.

Buffalo Bill shouted his discovery to Nomad and the other members of his party, who were not far off.

When they arrived he requested the old trapper to examine the canoe closely.

"Did you ever see it before?" he asked.

"Sioux canoes along the ole Missou', er even ther Staghorn, ain't so oncommon," mused Nomad, as he inspected it; "at times I has seen 'em a heap plenty. Still, thar is one cur'us thing: what's et doin' up hyar, when ther Sioux village is below? Unless——"

"Unless the Sioux that stole the gold had it?" said Pawnee. "But look closer."

Nomad looked closer; then turned it half over. Suddenly he whooped.

"Wow! This is ther canoe thet war at Morgan's. Still," he pondered, "does thet cut any grass? Morgan is dead, and I reckon some red tuck the canoe."

"It was gone, when we looked for it, after the death of Morgan," reminded the scout; "and we figured that Morgan's negro had cut out in it."

"And Morgan's negro was the rascal who stole the letter telling where the nuggets were cached," Pawnee added, "and found them near the Staghorn foothills. We got them out of the cache where the negro had put them himself; and, of course, he was close round there at the time, though we couldn't locate him. Does that mean anything, old Diamond?"

"Et mout mean," said Nomad, "thet ther nigger follered us down ther river. But I knows er nigger when I sees one; and thet warn't no nigger what come

inter camp and whangdoodled me an' ther baron, an' got erway wi' ther goods; no, sir-ee!"

"Necarnis believes, you know," recalled Pawnee, "that the Sioux was a white man painted and feathered; he thinks he has reasons for that belief. The supposed Sioux didn't go toward the Sioux village, nor cut out across country to join the little band of Sioux under Blue Wolf. And stealing gold nuggets isn't a Sioux trick. A Sioux would steal weapons and ammunition, food, a band of ponies, or a load of furs; but he wouldn't understand the value of a lot of dirt-covered nuggets, and risk his life to get them."

Nomad smiled quizzically.

"Et's kinda drawin' ther long bow, ain't et, ter assert that ther feller—Sioux or white man—thet peppered me and the baron war reskin' his life whilst he war doin' of et?"

He continued his inspection.

"Ef we didn't know whar all o' Ruff's men war when ther trick war turned so neat on me an' Schnitz—all of 'em livin' bein' our pris'ners, and tied so tight they c'dn't sneeze—I mout be figgerin' thet one er them cattle war linked up wi' Morgan's nigger; but thet is shore an onpossible combination."

He turned to Buffalo Bill.

"What does you make of et?"

"You've had a lot of experience, and I wanted to see if your conclusions were the same as mine and Pawnee's. They are—nearly."

"Which is not quite."

"We went with you that far, then a little farther. We are agreed that the man who blinded you and the baron, and got off with the gold was not a Sioux, and he couldn't have been one of Ruff's men. But he was a white man, and he was with Morgan's negro. They went up the Staghorn in this canoe, with the gold. Then they turned the canoe adrift, or it got away from them. In either case, there ought to be a trail up there somewhere. We've got to——"

A voice called, and a man was seen coming toward them from the base of the near-by hills.

"Ruff Reynolds hisself!" gulped Nomad. "Speaker ther——"

"He has sure got his nerfe mit him," said the baron, dropping hand to pistol. "Vot iss der meanness oof him abbearing here now, when ve are t'inking he iss nodd sooch a closeness py yedt?"

Engrossed in scanning the canoe, and speculating about it, they had not observed the approach of Reynolds until he was well on his way toward them.

Now the entire party stood silent, watching him.

There was a grin on his evil face as he came up. "How!" he cried, with the air of a man who feels that he is welcome. "I saw you confabulatin' hyar, an' jes' thought I'd drop in an see what it war all about."

He looked round, ignoring the blazing fire in the eyes of old Nomad and the manner in which the old man's fingers twitched on his rifle.

"Ye've found a canoe," he said. "Anything else?"

"You see what is here," the scout informed him coldly. "And now that you have satisfied your burning curiosity——"

"Now that I have, ye think I'd better be goin'?"

It was plain that Ruff Reynolds had encountered a serious disappointment. He had believed, when he heard the shout of the scout which announced the discovery of the canoe, that the lost treasure was located, and he had taken this risk to find out.

"You must know," said the scout, "that your room is better than your company."

Ruff forced another grin, and sat down on the prow of the canoe.

"I don't like ter be hurried," he declared impudently. "Of course, ye know now, sense I have showed up, that we fellers have been trailin' along, under cover o' ther hills, keepin' tabs on ye. Fer the why of it, I reckon you can guess. It's been clear to us that somebody has been smart enough to git that treasure away frum ye, and that you have been makin' frantic efforts to locate him—or them. I don't suppose you'll deny that."

"We're not talking about our plans—to you," said the scout.

"All right; I ain't goin' to let it fret me, if you don't." He got up. "All my men aire out thar," he said, waving a hand toward the hills, "jest out of sight, but ready to jump in, if I need 'em. I suppose I'll haf to go back an' tell 'em them nuggets aire still playin' hide an' seek along this river. Sorry it's so."

Buffalo Bill's face was flushed with anger.

"It's your plan to trail along after us?"

"Waal, we ain't got much else to do," the scoundrel brazenly admitted; "we ain't in no hurry to jump fer civilization, whar sheriffs aire apt to be most unkind to men of our stripe. And as fer drivin' us off," he said, as he swung away, "I allow, Cody, you ain't got force enough to do it."

"Waugh!" Nomad whooped, panting with indignation as Reynolds walked on. "Do we haf to stand sass like thet, Buffler?"

"Cool off, old man," Pawnee advised. "What can we do?"

"We could have held him," said the scout; "but that would have brought on a fight. Still, it grinds me as much as it does Nomad, to have a man of that stamp so flauntingly defiant."

There could be no doubt that Ruff's men were in the hills, for some of them were seen dodging about there when Ruff rejoined them.

"I'm in favor of letting the gold go," said the girl, alarmed again. "It isn't worth the risk. And now, if we should find it, it would simply mean that we should have to fight those men to keep it. If we go downstream, while the Sioux are not troubling, we can get through their territory, I should think."

"It's a lot of gold," said her brother; "but I'm willing to let it go, too. We can't ask our friends here to do more than they have. I think Lou is right; we

ought to give it up, and get out of the country while we can."

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee thought differently.

"We dislike to admit defeat, necarnis and I," Pawnee phrased it. "And we just can't stand the thought of being bulldozed by a set of ruffians. This canoe seems to offer a clew—the first we've come on; and if we can locate the thieves and the gold, I'll trust necarnis to work out a plan that will shake off those scoundrels."

"Ach, yah!" said the baron. "Idt iss me dot haf lost der gelt, unt ve haf to get it pack some more. Unt vot a habbiness idt vill be to seen idt again. Ach, du lieber! Ve couldt nodd stop now."

The baron and Nomad, in truth, had been heroically diligent in the search, feeling that they were to blame for the loss of the treasure.

While they halted, cooked food, and talked the matter over, Buffalo Bill fashioned a paddle for the canoe, out of a small tree cut down with his hatchet.

"Pawnee and I will proceed in the canoe," he said. "We can readily cross from shore to shore with its help, search out the willows, and look for tracks in the sand."

The other members of the party kept along the bank, when the start was made, watching for "sign" there, and for any indications of trickery which might be made by the rascally followers of Reynolds.

For an entire day thereafter not a thing occurred worthy of note. Ruff Reynolds and his outlaws were not seen again; though nothing seemed surer than that they were trailing along in the hills.

The Staghorn was entered, and followed toward its source, in the Staghorn range; for it was the great scout's belief that in this direction the thieves had gone, as no other fork of the river led into a region offering such shelter.

Then a suggestive and unexpected thing happened, while they were paddling along quietly: A painted Indian, or what looked to be one, came to the surface of the river.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee were quite as much astonished as the crafty Indian who had popped out of his water cave too soon.

As the reader is aware, the Indian was Bill Garner.

With a splash like that of a leaping fish, he dropped back, and disappeared.

"Well, now, what do you think about that!" Pawnee gasped.

Watching the surface of the river, the scout did not answer. But letting the canoe float in the direction the Indian had been going, he got his rope ready.

The painted figure did not show itself again. There was a clear view of the river in each direction farther than any man could swim under water, and along the shores no spot where he could rise and conceal himself from view.

"Amigo mio," said Pawnee, "I thought I saw an Indian! I hope I haven't had a touch of sun."

"It's a queer thing," commented the scout.

"It's clear that if a swimmer doesn't rise in a place like this he stays down, and if he stays down he has drowned."

"It seems to be a safe proposition, yet I can't accept it."

"I was just stating a natural conclusion, without accepting it myself. He has poked his nose up by the rocks somewhere, and we can't see him."

For ten or fifteen minutes they held the canoe close to the spot where the "Indian" had been seen, and at the end of that time confessed themselves mightily puzzled.

Not willing to admit defeat, however, they explored every shadowy hole. The result was disappointment.

By this time the party on shore had drawn abreast of the canoe, and began to fire questions. So the canoe was turned to land, and the questioners were made acquainted with what had happened.

Nomad looked startled, and began to talk of whiskizos. The baron toyed with the Trouble Maker in his pocket.

"Der excitement iss coming again," he muttered, "afddher two tays in which notting is doing."

"The thing is simple enough," said the scout to Nomad. "The rascal is in hiding—that's all."

"At ther bottom o' ther river? Waugh!"

"He'll have to come out of his hiding place some time," said Jack Brandon. "He can't climb that bluff over there. Anyway, when he does come out we ought to hear him. I suppose you've no doubt, Cody, that it's the Indian we have been following—the one that took the gold? If so, it seems to indicate that you were wrong in thinking that the work of a white man disguised."

"That last doesn't naturally follow; this Indian may be a white man painted."

"Twould take might good paint to withstand river worter," urger Nomad.

"That's so, too," Buffalo Bill admitted.

He did not deny that he was puzzled.

CHAPTER VII.

MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCES.

The baron had no need to coax the Trouble Maker after that.

A day that passed without giving him a large thrill of excitement was a red-letter day indeed. For a week the scout's party hid out in the hills, watched the stream, and waited. And things happened. Before the end of the week old Nomad had a genuine case of whiskizos.

Not unnaturally, the first bit of mystery came in the night—that first night. The baron was on guard, with Nomad curled up near him, the others being engaged in catching a few winks of much-needed sleep, when there arose a sound of subterranean thunder, followed by Indian yells.

Nomad came up with a bound, and found the baron

gasping, and staring down at the little river. Even the sleepers had been awakened.

"Dit you hear dot?" the baron demanded.

"Waal, I'd be deaf, dumb, an' blind," growled Nomad, "ef I didn't hear et."

"Idt iss in der rifer," explained the baron; "Inchuns are yelling py der rifer in."

"I reckon thet's right, Buffler," the trapper declared to the scout, as the latter ran up. "Listen ter thet! Injun yells. An' thar she goes erg'in—thet thunder; an' sounds like it's comin' out o' ther river."

"The noise is beyond the high bluff," declared Pawnee. "Indians are yelling and dancing; but, necarnis, did you ever hear an Indian drum thunder like that?"

The whole party now stood together, listening. Again the thunder came, and the yelling, apparently out of the river.

"Pard Bill, that's from beyond the bluff," Pawnee insisted, in spite of the evidence of his ears. "That lone Indian we saw playing porpoise evidently had company plenty, eh?"

As suddenly as it had begun, the noise ended.

"Stay close in camp here," the scout requested. "Pawnee, let's look into that."

Slipping down to the stream, they launched the canoe, which had been drawn ashore as a measure of precaution, and crossed quietly. Then they propelled the canoe through the black shadows, laying down their paddles now and then to listen.

"Nothing doing on the river, necarnis," said Pawnee. "I'm still sticking to my belief that the sounds came from the other side of the bluff."

Hauling up the canoe, they slipped ashore, and after a toilsome climb reached the other side of the bluff. But on that side silence now lay as heavily as over the river.

"We saw nothing, and we heard nothing," they were compelled to report when they returned to camp.

A very thorough search the next day brought the same result.

"I ain't a man ter show ther white feather, Buffler," said Nomad; "but don't ye think thet we mout take the advice of the gal, and make er crawfeesh downstream? I don't like even ter suggest et, but——"

"Which means," said the scout, "that my old friend Nomad is scared."

The borderman tried to laugh.

"T'd like ter git erway from hyar before I gits skeered, thet's all," he admitted. "O' course, you don't b'lieve in whiskizos, and——"

"And you don't, when the day is bright and you're not frightened."

The girl came forward with a suggestion.

"I've been thinking that might have been the rumblings of an earthquake. This land seems volcanic, and we're not so very far from the geysers of the Yellowstone country. A geyser blowing its head off might make a noise like that, mightn't it?"

"Airthquakes don't rumble and geysers don't bust

up ter the accompanerment of Injun yellin'," Nomad objected.

"The Indians might have yelled because they were frightened," she urged, "just as we were. When the rumbling came each time, you recall that the yells followed instantly."

Nomad shook his head.

"Injuns yell when they're rejoicin', er fightin', er preparin' fer a fight; they don't yell—not thet way—when they're skeered."

"Then you suggest something," she said, smiling at him, though she felt little enough like smiling.

"Whiskizos!" he sputtered.

"They're ghosts, I believe?"

"More like ha'nts," said Nomad; "which thar is er heap o' difference."

"What is the difference," she said, dropping down by him, "between a ghost and a haunt?"

"Waal," he answered, "ef ye sh'd see ther speret o' yer dead gran'mother, thet 'd be a ghost. But ef some time in ther night a b'ar sh'd come up ter ye, an' ask ye fer er chaw o' terbacker, an' breathe red smoke through ets nostriles; an' then you sh'd find thet ye ain't whar ye thought ye aire, but miles frum et—that wouldn't be er ha'nt; thet would be er proof thet whiskizos had been playin' tag with ye."

"An'," he went on slowly and solemnly, "ef in ther night ye hears thunderin' and Injun yellin' comin' frum the bottom of a river, whar an Injun had sunk and drowned on'y ther day before, thet is a sign thet whiskizos is gittin' ready ter play tag wi' ye, an' yer had better hit ther high places gittin' erway."

"And a ha'nt?" she persisted.

He cackled nervously, trying to laugh.

"Waal, a whiskizoo is a ha'nt thet has gone crazy; an' a ha'nt—waal, et is jes' a ha'nt."

"So you don't think that what we heard could have been an earthquake, or the noise of a geyser?"

"P'intedly, without intendin' ter skeer ye none, I don't. In my time I has heard both. This was plum' different."

Squatted near by was the young Piute, busy with his medicine hoof—the dried hoof of a mustang that had wonderful power to make him invulnerable and protect him from the trickery of spirits. Nomad pointed to him.

"Ask Little Cayuse ef what we heerd warn't Injun yellin'?"

"Much heap plenty Injun make um howl," the Piute asserted.

"And what did ye make o' that sound?" demanded Nomad, seeking the Piute's backing.

The Piute stopped, faced round, and held up the medicine hoof. His face was as grave as Nomad's.

"You savvy me? Trouble in um spirit land." He pointed to the opposite bluff, beyond the stream. "Had spirit stay under ground, git um punish, make um howl; Ne-ah-eeg shake um chain—make thunder sound."

Ne-ah-eeg was the chief devil of the Piute underworld.

"Very bad!" said the Piute, shaking his head, then getting busy again with the medicine hoof.

"So there you have it, Miss Brandon," said Buffalo Bill, smiling. "You see what courageous material I have to work with out in these hills."

She turned to him.

"Then, what do you make of those noises we all heard?"

He still smiled.

"Nothing—yet."

That night another thing occurred—this time of a character to excite curiosity rather than fear:

On top of the high bluff a light flashed out, burned for a second or two, then winked into darkness. A dozen times this was repeated.

"Indian signaling—that's plain enough," said Pawnee.

The next day, with Buffalo Bill, he crossed the stream and climbed to the top of the bluff. But they found nothing there to reward them.

Sitting on top of the bluff they looked over the river and the country roundabout.

"Apparently, we're not making progress, necarnis," remarked Pawnee, as he smoked a quiet cigar; "yet we are. We know that instead of one Indian there are a number, and they have a cave under this hill. But whether they are connected with that stolen treasure is a point that is yet to be settled. The Indian that popped out of the water was a Sioux. But was that Sioux signaling last night?"

"It didn't look it," the scout admitted.

"And you aren't ready to say that the Sioux we saw was a Sioux?"

"Not yet. But if a Sioux, then he had no connection with the treasure."

"But he might have had that canoe—it's a Sioux canoe."

"True enough. Morgan bought the canoe of the Sioux, and after his death they may have taken it."

"If I'm hitting the right guess trail, the place to look for the entrance to the cave that I'm supposing is somewhere right beneath us is to search along the river, near where we saw the Indian; but—we have searched there to the limit."

"And discovered nothing."

"Not a blessed thing. So we've got to look for another entrance. The Indian who flashed that signal light came out of the cave; then sneaked back into it. What do you say to lying out here to-night and watching for him?"

"It's a good suggestion."

They slept on top of the bluff that night, and watched for the Indian they supposed to be the author of the light. Instead of a light, the strange occurrence was a queer romping sound, like children dancing.

"Indians?" queried Pawnee. "It's right off in that direction."

Having listened for ten or fifteen minutes they de-

cided to investigate the singular sound, and crept stealthily toward it.

But it ended before they were down from the bluff.

In the morning, before returning to the camp, they explored about; and came to a large, placid pool, which lay in a cuplike depression resembling the rim of an extinct crater. Round the pool was sand, which had been beaten by tracks; but the tracks were the tracks of wolves!

"I don't know but that this is the most surprising thing we have yet encountered," Buffalo Bill declared. "Try to picture what we might have seen here, if it had been daytime."

"A band of wolves playing ring-around-a-rosy about this pool; as a finish to the picture they ought to have been on their hind legs, with hands joined in a circle—I mean paws."

Buffalo Bill inspected the tracks closely.

"I think," he said slowly, "that you have pictured just what would have been seen—just what occurred."

"Dancing in a circle, on their hind legs, with paws joined?"

"With hands joined," said the scout. "Take a close look."

"It takes mighty good eyes, and well trained, to distinguish between tracks made by the hind feet of a wolf and those made by its fore feet," said Pawnee, dropping to his knees as he made this examination. "But—I think you're right. And I'm not so stupid as not to know what you mean. You think that the wolves we heard dancing here in the night were Indians?"

"Just so. But you'll observe a peculiar thing—more peculiar than anything else. Where did these Indians, or wolves, go when they finished their dancing?"

Pawnee Bill enlarged his circle, making a thorough search; but he could find no tracks beyond that beaten area, though the sand extended farther.

"It's a good thing that Nomad and Little Cayuse aren't here," he remarked, "or this would produce a stampede; you couldn't hold them in this neighborhood. Necarnis, these tracks begin and end right here."

"Therefore—"

Pawnee looked round again, to make sure that he was right.

"I'm going to let you figure out the 'therefore.' I'm afraid to say."

"If the Indians didn't walk to this place, nor away from it, they came out of that pool, and went back into it."

Staring at the placid bit of water, Pawnee smoked up, while considering this.

"I s'pose, necarnis, that you're right—you must be; there seems to be no other possible conclusion. But it's a queer thing."

"Like that redskin popping to the surface of the river, and disappearing right before our eyes."

Buffalo Bill made a more extended examination before they went away. It had occurred to him that by using long vaulting poles the redskins might have

cleared the sand; but no evidence was found to bolster this.

"We'll say nothing about this to Nomad and Cayuse," he said, as they turned again toward the river. "The Piute might desert us, and Nomad would be seeking a whiskizoo behind every rock."

Nor did they mention it to the Brandons; for, though the Brandons were not superstitious, there seemed no need to burden them with it.

They found the camp agog with eager curiosity.

"Thar war dancin' right on top o' the bluff, clus by ye, last night," the trapper declared.

"It was far beyond us," the scout informed him; "so you can see how easy it is to be mistaken as to the location of sounds.

"But 'twarn't Injuns dancin'?" said Nomad. "An' ef not Injuns——"

"It was Indians dancing," said the scout.

"You seen 'em?"

"No."

"You looked fer the tracks this mornin'?"

"We couldn't find any Indian tracks," the scout was forced to confess.

Nomad dropped out of the questioning circle, thumbed tobacco into his pipe, and lighted it with a coal from the camp fire, and he said not a word, but it was clear that, like the parrot, he was doing a lot of thinking.

That afternoon Louise Brandon came hurriedly over to where the scout was sitting with Pawnee, a queer look on her face.

"I don't know whether all these singular happenings has set my imagination to working overtime or not," she said; "but don't you notice a singular odor?"

"I've been fogging the air so thick round here with tobacco smoke that I haven't smelt anything else," said Pawnee.

Buffalo Bill made a similar admission.

"I get nothing but the odor of tobacco smoke right here," said the girl; "but if you will step over there, and leave off your smoking; well, I'm going to leave you to say what the scent is like."

Away from the smoke of the pipes and the camp fire they stood sniffing the air.

"Violets!" said Pawnee.

"A south wind breathing over banks of violets," she added; "and there isn't a violet in the country, and it is not the right season for violets."

"Pleasant, though," added the scout, lifting his nose; "a scent of violets. Of course you haven't been using any violet perfume, Miss Brandon?"

"I never do. Can you get the direction of the wind? there doesn't seem to be any breeze here."

The scout mounted a rocky pinnacle.

"There is a slight breeze from the river."

"Everything comes from that river—every mysterious thing!"

The scout glanced down at Nomad. He was still squatted by the camp fire, where at intervals he smoked; he had hardly moved for hours.

"Too much camp smoke and tobacco smoke—it won't reach him."

"Then you think there is something mysterious about it?" asked the girl.

"I think there is a cave under that bluff, or beyond it; and that the odor comes from the cave."

"Violets in a cave—in a haunted Indian cave!" Her tone was skeptical. "Anyway, I have been led to believe that if there is a cave it is haunted!"

"Haunted by some very live Indians," said the scout gravely.

"And they have been out gathering violets—where no violets are to be had?"

"Burning them, is my guess; or, rather, burning something that gives out an odor like that of violets."

"Oh!"

"It is only a guess, Miss Brandon; I confess it may be very far from the facts. Though we think a cave must be over there somewhere, we can't locate it; and it is to be remembered that we have actually seen but one Indian."

"And think that he is a white man, or was a white man, if he is drowned, Colonel Cody?" She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm afraid that I, too, am beginning to believe in whiskizos."

"Let whiskizos stand for whatever is mysterious—and that is about what they stand for to Nomad—and I shall believe in them also; until light is let in, and the mystery disappears."

"You are making no progress toward locating the nuggets," she said. "I dislike to say it—I don't want to discourage you; but I think you will never find them. So long as we stay here, we are not only nerve-racked by the queer things constantly happening, but we are in great and constant danger. Though we have seen nothing of Ruff Reynolds since we came up here, we have every reason to think that he and his men are watching us continually. And you say yourself that Indians are in the vicinity. I declare to you that I'm beginning to be afraid to close my eyes. And I'll ask you what could keep any one who wished to do so from shooting into the camp from those hills?"

The scout tried to reassure her.

"Still," he said, when she refused to think that dangers were not thickening round them, "if you and your brother are really anxious to retreat from here, I can lend you Nomad and Cayuse as an escort. They are crazy to hit the back trail, and if you combed the country you couldn't get more reliable men nor stronger fighters. They are cowardly only when they think they are facing the mysterious; then a puff of wind can throw them into a flutter of fear."

But the girl was not really anxious to hasten away; and she knew her brother would oppose the idea so long as Buffalo Bill willed to remain.

"The trouble with necarnis is," remarked Pawnee, putting in an oar, "he's like one of those men you read about, that don't know when they're whipped. And so long as that unpleasant information hasn't

reached him, of course he can't make up his mind to retreat."

"Pard Lillie," said the scout, "the real fighting hasn't begun yet."

"No?" said the girl. "When is it to begin, then?"

Buffalo Bill laughed lightly.

"Just as soon," he said, "as we can find the foe."

CHAPTER VIII.

A CAPTURE.

Other things happened, on other nights—queer noises on, in, or under the bluff, or the river; no one could say what they were, or just where they were.

Nomad grew every day more convinced that whiskizos were "piroutin' round," Buffalo Bill and Pawnee more sure that Indians were lurking about with unknown intentions, the Brandons less hopeful that the lost treasure could be again located. The Piute scraped himself stealthily with his "medicine hoof;" and the baron, whenever there was a brief lull in mysterious activities, put the Trouble Maker on duty and talked to it, if he was alone.

The two scouts were ceaseless in their efforts to discover the cave in whose existence they had come to believe, and spent many night hours in quiet watching on the bluff and by the river.

So the week went by.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee were patrolling the river by the bluff in the canoe, as had become now their nightly custom. Naturally, they talked of the mystery; there was nothing which could quite drive that out of their minds.

"I've been up against many odd combinations, necarnis; but for a ring-tailed side-winder this knocks the persimmon. Great oaks from little acorns grow, eh? It would seem so. Just think of it!"

"I don't do anything else," Buffalo Bill confessed.

"Same here; I haven't time for anything else. We're nearly forgetting that we came up here on a hunt for those nugget bags. When you paw the case over it gets odder all the time—or seems to. One man, at the start, becomes a dozen—perhaps fifty. Just run it over in your mind:

"Down on the flats of the old Missou', while we are out trying to beguile Red Hand into giving us a free pass with our prisoners and mule load of nuggets through his territory, a Sioux walks into our camp, where are only a fool Dutchman and a whiskizooed old trapper; each with a bat in his belfry along certain lines, Nomad's specialty being whiskizos and ha'nts, and the baron's frenzied desire to shake hands with all kinds of excitement.

"This Sioux has that queer little Indian figure, and offers to sell it to the baron for a Trouble Maker; it will start trouble, and keep it whooping along to beat the band—according to Mr. Sioux.

"The baron has bought Trouble Makers before, and always got soaked in the deals; yet he isn't able to over-

look anything offered and warranted in that line, and he asks the Indian questions, when he should have jumped on him and made him a prisoner, for your careful after-inspection.

"Nomad, coming into camp, reproves the baron; but isn't any more cautious. The result is, the Sioux hurls red pepper in their eyes, which blinds them and throws them into fits of agony, and while they are pawing at their eyes, he quietly leads Toofer away with that mule load of nugget bags, and puts them in a canoe on the river, turning Toofer loose.

"That is what we think—though we have no evidence, other than that the nuggets are gone, the trail of the mule went to the river, and there were no other trails there or on the other side.

"You say that the work shows that the Sioux was really a white man in disguise; and when we find this canoe on the Staghorn, you add a belief that the white man was aided by that black fellow, Rastus Grimesby, who has been chasing the nuggets from the first.

"Up here we see an Indian rise from the water like a fish, and plunge down again. And afterward we hear queer noises, see a flashing light, discover a pool where wolves have danced a ring-around-the-rosy, smell sweet violets, and get lost thereafter in the worst fog of doubt I ever ran my nose into.

"We're stumped—and for two or three nights we have made no sort of progress."

"And ought to quit?" asked Buffalo Bill. "That is your conclusion?"

"Oh, I'm game! I can stay here for a month—two months, or six, if it will do any good. We're running short of grub, though; and there isn't anything worth hunting in these hills."

Pawnee spoke in a quiet voice that could not have been heard ten steps away, apparently. Yet he was now heard, by some one on the side of the bluff; at least that was a reasonable conclusion, for a scrambling sound was heard there, as of some one trying to climb away.

It ended abruptly, or rather changed its character; then something dark whisked through the air, hit the water with a loud splash, and went under.

"Scoot-a-wah-boo!" Pawnee breathed, lifting his paddle as if he sought to brain the thing when it rose; though he only stared into the stream, when the object had vanished. "I reckon, necarnis, our man fish is at it again."

With a noiseless dip of the paddle Buffalo Bill urged the canoe toward the spot.

"Look out for him, if he comes up; get your rope ready!"

"He isn't going to come up, if he is our man."

But Pawnee jerked out the coil of his rope. And just in time. For the head of a man popped to the surface at that moment, a round black ball hardly to be seen in the gloom. But the man began to flail the water with his hands, and Pawnee let the rope go.

It was a splendid cast, dropping the noose over the

man's head; after which Pawnee tightened it with a jerk, and began to draw in.

The man coughed and gurgled, struck out wildly with his hands, sank, and came up again. All the while Pawnee pulled in on the line, and at last brought the floundering object close against the gunwale.

"Hold her steady," he said, "and maybe I can get this man fish into the canoe."

The continued struggles of the man causing the canoe to dip alarmingly, Pawnee led the line to the prow; and, pulling the man to that end, he got him by the collar, and with a dexterous and strenuous effort, while the scout held the canoe as steady as he could, he got his catch aboard.

"A white man," said Pawnee; "or a ki-yi wearing a white man's clothing. As usual, it begins to seem that your surmise was right. He's pretty well filled up with water; so I guess you'd better paddle ashore, where we can turn it out of him."

The man was half drowned; at any rate, after being pulled into the canoe, he lay in the bottom without a sound.

When the shore was gained, they found there old Nomad and Little Cayuse; who, having been on guard in the camp, had heard the noise on the river. Though game enough to hasten down to investigate, they were bursting with superstitious fright.

"What ye ketched?" breathed Nomad, when he saw them lifting the man out of the canoe.

"One of your whiskizos, old man," said the scout. "Give us a lift here, while we carry him to the camp."

But Nomad danced on before, with the Piute.

"We think," Pawnee explained, as they dumped the man down in the camp, "that we have caught the white man who played Sioux Indian."

"Whur-oo!" Nomad rumbled. "Cayuse, set thet fire a-goin', so's we can have a look. Course I knowed et warn't any whiskizoo; one er them things couldn't be ketched. Whar war he?"

"In the river."

"I wonder! Doin' ther divin' act, like thet Injun! Et eases my mind that ye've got him. Ef he is shore ther critter thet socked thet pepper into my eyes he's goin'—"

The baron and the Brandons came out of the "arms of Morphine," as Nomad would have put it, and began to line questions at the group by the fire which the trembling hands of the Piute was kindling.

"Der ret bepper Sioux!" the baron gasped.

"We're only guessing at this," said Pawnee. "Twist a torch out of a bit of rope, Nomad, and let's have a glance at him."

The torch fell from Nomad's hand, when he held it over the face of the unconscious man.

"Waugh!" he rumbled. "'Tain't neither white man ner Sioux—et's Ruff Reynolds!"

So it was.

They made haste to get the water out of the scoun-

drel by rolling him on the ground and working his arms up and down; then they gave him stimulant.

"All thet worter in him must er been a surprise ter ther insides of a man thet yoosually lives on whisky," said Nomad, as they struggled to bring Reynolds back to consciousness.

Before they had restored Reynolds and set him down by the camp fire, the Piute was stationed out in the darkness to guard against the irruption of Ruff's followers, who were supposed now to be near.

Even after he had regained consciousness, it took the scoundrel some time to recall what had happened to him, and understand where he was and how situated, and a much longer time to regain his strength.

Chagrin took the place of the other emotions that had filled him.

"That was you fellers on the river?" he asked. "If it was, I'm the dadblastedest fool in seventeen States."

"For why?" asked Pawnee. "You were foolish for not keeping still when you heard the murmur of my gentle voice—is that it?"

"So it was you!"

"Cody was with me."

"Waal, I thought—but it don't matter what I thought. I got skeered, and tried to climb over the bluff, but slipped."

"And fell into the river."

"That's the size of it. Then you fished me out, and hyar," he looked round, "hyar I am."

"And you aren't feeling good about it?" said the scout.

Reynolds looked round again nervously and seemed about to speak, then relapsed into silence.

"Where are your men?" the scout asked.

"That's all right, Cody," said Ruff; "they ain't so fur off but what, if I lift my voice, they can hear me, you bet."

"We have thought," remarked Jack Brandon, "that your crowd was near all the while."

"Clost by," admitted the ruffian.

Nomad hitched closer, took a pull at his pipe, then shot Ruff a question:

"What has you been hearin' an' seein' sense you've been hangin' round thet bluff over thar?"

"That's all right," said Ruff, casting another nervous glance round; "I don't have to answer yer fool questions."

"You've been seein' and hearing things you didn't understand?" queried Jack Brandon.

"My men have jes' been sloshin' round over thar," said Ruff; "what of it? What you goin' to do with me now?" he asked of the scout.

"Hold you."

"If you try it," Ruff threatened, "my men will be right on top o' ye."

"They're not near, Ruff, or we'd have heard them; besides, we've got over being afraid of them."

The next morning, seeing that he was not to be released as promptly as he had hoped for, the villain was more willing to offer up his store of knowledge.

"I'd like to talk with ye, Cody," he said, "quiet an' alone, ye know!"

"No one is close by right now," said the scout; "so go ahead."

"I'm willin' to tell what I know, pervided ye'll let me go."

"It isn't worth it, Ruff," the scout declared, "for I've already discovered that you have learned nothing. You have seen things, and heard things, that you didn't understand; that's all."

"I-been watchin' round."

"Playing the game of hide-out, hoping that you'd be on hand when we found the gold."

"Put it that way; yes, that's the fact. But you hain't found it."

"We haven't."

"Thar's mighty queer doin's round this river," said Ruff, ignoring the fact that he had virtually declared he would not talk unless his release was promised.

"We've seen and heard some odd things ourselves."

"Like sounds and lights, and—and wolves dancin'?"

"The same, Ruff."

"Waal, what do ye make of it?"

"We're still investigating."

"Did ye see any o' the wolves?"

"None—yet."

"Waal," said Ruff, bending forward and sinking his voice, "I'm goin' to ask ye what you think of this? What if you saw a light, and slid up to it, and when you was lookin' at it and tryin' ter figger out about it, a wolf should come stealin' on ye, and sink a knife into ye?"

"That happened to you?"

"It did. Only the wolf didn't drive that knife straight; and while it ketched me in the side, and tore my coat—you can see hyar the slit in it, whar the knife went—it didn't give me more'n a light rake."

"When was this?"

"Two nights ago."

"Then what?"

"I'd 'a' thought it was a man, on account of the knife; but as I fell and rolled over thet wolf jumped on me with its teeth, snarlin' and bitin'—I got a rake on my neck, right thar!—and then I knifed it."

"Killed it?" said the scout, astonished by the statement, which was apparently made in all earnestness.

"Thar war others—I dunno how many," said Ruff; "but as I rolled down that hill, with my knife diggin' into that one, they slid out. Anyhow, when I got down to the bottom of the hill I was hanging onto that one, and the critter war dead as a doornail."

He was breathing heavily, and the scout understood better now why he glanced round so much—he was afraid he might see again one of the wolves that carried a knife, and still was a wolf.

"What does yer think of it?"

The scout looked at him without replying.

"I can show ye the body o' that wolf!"

Buffalo Bill laughed, then:

"That reminds me, Ruff, of the man who claimed he had caught a big fish, and offered to prove it by exhibiting his fishline."

"You think I'm lyin'? Promise that you'll let me go, and I'll take you to that wolf."

"And show me the knife, too!"

"I didn't find the knife, though the next day I looked, and that was a queer part of it; but mebbysso it had rolled into a hole. But I found wolf tracks all round. I see what ye think," he added. "You think that I killed a wolf, then made up that yarn about it. But, s'help me——"

"You needn't make it any stronger. Tell me where you put the body of that wolf, and I'll go and look at it."

"Then you'll let me go?"

"I think I'll have to hold you, Ruff," was all the scout said.

That afternoon, having received information from Ruff as to the location of the dead wolf, the scout took Pawnee, crossed the river, and found the wolf. It had been killed with a knife.

Up on the hill, where, according to Ruff's statement, the fight had occurred, nothing was discovered but a few dabs of grease on a rock.

"Here is where the lamp was set that Ruff crawled up to inspect," remarked the scout, when he made the discovery.

"You're really taking stock in that story, then, ne-carnis?"

"I'm investigating. All we know is that here is a dead wolf."

But the investigation yielded nothing further.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEGRO AND THE BARON.

"Go away, trouble, tek down yo' black han',
Fo' trouble's neveh goin' tuh trouble me;
Cl'ar out, trouble, an' leave dis honey lan',
Wha' de mockin' bird is singin' tuh de bee."

The baron was out on the sunny slope, beyond the river and the bluff. He lifted his head like a cautious old turtle, when he heard the song, and began to crawl toward the singer.

Two days had passed since the capture of Ruff Reynolds—two days of such sunshiny quiet as had not been experienced since Buffalo Bill set up his camp beyond the river. If judged by that fact alone, the conclusion could have been reached readily that Ruff and his men were alone responsible for all the queer happenings, and the happenings had been stopped by Ruff's capture.

The baron held to this opinion, and maintained it with arguments.

When this did not satisfy, he went forth to seek proofs; and he was seeking them now, untroubled by any of the superstitions which chilled the energies of Nomad and the Piute.

"Dot singer, he iss der nigger," said the baron. "I haf heardt his moosic pefore. Oof I can rake him in he vill sbeak some answers to mine kvestions pooty kvick, I pedt you."

The baron had the Trouble Maker with him—it was now in his pocket; and he had been polishing it and staring at it a little while before, in the hope that it would start something. Apparently something had started, and the baron was in high glee.

Taking it out now, he shifted it to his left hand, juggled the revolver into his right, and proceeded with his crawl. And the negro continued his singing, which was but a low drone, yet clearly heard:

"De cotton needs a hoein';
But de watermillion's growin';
An' ol' joy is overflowin',
Neaf de honeysuckle tree.

"So make has', trouble, an' leave dis happy lan';
Pick up yo' feet, trouble, an'——"

The final words were drowned in a rattling sound.

The rattling still sounded and the song was still droning when the baron, having hitched to the top of a slight rise, looked over and beheld the negro, Rastus Grimesby, industriously keeping time to his music by shaking a weasel-skin medicine bag of undoubted Sioux origin.

On the ground, well screened in by rocks, the darky sat, with eyes half closed, rocking his body. His clothing was wet and tattered, and well plastered with mud; so that he seemed a forlorn object, in spite of his song.

"He iss drifting away trouble," thought the baron, with quick comprehension; "while me—I am hoondt-ing idt. Sooch a tiffence!"

"Move on, trouble, an' leave dis happy lan',
Pick up yo' feet, trouble, an' jine de movin' ban';
Fo' ol' joy is overflowin', neaf de honeysuckle tree,
An' trouble nevehmo' can trouble me."

"He iss a habbiness, budt he tond't look idt!" the baron muttered. "I vonder oof meppys he iss so habby pecause he haf got dot gelt yedt? Cody iss peliefing dot der nigger iss mit der Inchun vot dhrow der bepper py my eyes in unt Nomadt's, unt dhis iss der fairst dime dot der itea seem to gontain some trootfulness. He tond't know I am here py myselluf. Vale——"

He lifted the Trouble Maker, waved it in the direction of the self-absorbed negro, then crawled on over the rise, his revolver and the Trouble Maker pushed well ahead of him.

The sliding of a pebble under the baron brought Rastus out of his half trance. When he looked round with a start, and would have jumped to his feet on seeing the baron, the latter rocked to a sitting position and pointed his big revolver.

"Yoost dake idt kvietly," the baron urged; "odder-wise, der iss going to be some exblosion dot vill sboil der looks oof you. Yaw, dot is right—sit town again."

The negro dropped back, awed by the big pistol that stared him so straight in the face.

But instantly his arm came up and he shook the weasel skin.

"Go away, trouble!" he expostulated.

"You are knowing me," said the baron; "so some indrotuitions can be dispensed mit, huh? Unt I am knowing you, oder our agvaintance he iss limidet. You are der bartner oof der Inchun vot haf stole der gelt, mit der ret beppers—iss idt not, yes?"

"Go 'way, white man!" Rastus protested, and shook the weasel skin again, making its contents rattle loudly. "Shoo! Go 'way!"

The baron hoisted the Trouble Maker.

"I haf vun also-o," he said. "So oof you put sbells on me by him, I vill put sbells on you likewise. Drobt idt!"

"What you want, white man?" said Rastus, his tones shaky and troubled.

"Vot iss idt you haf been doing?"

Rastus' manner changed, his face brightened, and he forced a negro laugh.

"I was wukkin' tuh frighten 'way trouble, which has been so thick roun' mah haid lately dat I is sho' distracted. You one o' Buff'lo Bill's men; I has seen you befo'."

"Idt iss a monkey-doodle foolishness to drive idt away—for dhen you haf no oxcidement; unt oxcidement idt iss der spicyness oof life. Budt you tidn't answer me mein kvestions."

"I cain't talk, ef you pushes dat pistol at mah haid!" Rastus declared. "Tek hit down."

The baron laid it on the rock, within reach of his hand.

"Go aheadt mit your exblanadions."

"Dat's all."

"Vare are you sdaying roundt here?"

"Jes' campin' out," said Rastus.

"All py your lonesomeness?"

"Yas, suh."

"Unt dot gelt?"

"What yo' mean, white man?"

"Dose nuggets vot you sdeal away from ower gamp vhen you dhrow der ret beppers py ower eyes in?"

Rastus shook his head.

"I doan' know nuthin' 'bout dat."

"You tidn't do idt?"

"No, suh."

"Vare iss der Inchun?"

"I doan' know 'bout no Injun. Which Injun you meanin'?"

"Der Inchun vot took der gelt."

"I doan' know, suh."

"Vot iss idt dot make der trouple for you, dot you

are drifting away when I am coming py myselluf here! You answer him straightdt."

Rastus twisted uneasily, shook the rattle, and evidently took time to frame his answer.

"Dat trouble is in mah haid—dat's all."

"You imachine idt, like Nomadt? I vouldt trade a prewery for an imachination like dot—I vouldt haf oxcidement all der times."

The negro shook the medicine bag again.

"I ain't incapable uh undehstandin' all dem big words," he urged.

He flung a glance round, as if estimating his chances of getting away safely. Dropping the medicine bag, he seemed to fumble, trying to pick it up. When his hand came up it held a small stone, and this he shot at the head of the baron.

The aim was so true that the baron went over backward, with the sensation of having the top of his head caved in, and the negro, springing up, took refuge in hurried flight.

When the German struggled to his feet, dizzy and faint, with the noise of a big drum booming inside of his skull, Rastus Grimesby was not in sight; the trail made by his feet as he plowed through the sand beyond the rock nest was visible.

"Yiminy grickedts!" the baron fumed, laying hand on his aching head. "Dot vos der limidt. Yoost when I am asking some beaceable kvestions!" He stooped and picked up his revolver. "I vill make mincemeadt oudt oof dot goot-for-notting nigger, oof I gatch him vunce again."

A sheepish look crossed his face, as he rubbed his bruised head and reflected.

Then, as if to change the current of his thought, he rubbed the Trouble Maker.

"Idt vos you vat done idt, huh? You make der trouple. Vale, I coom oudt hoondting oxcidement, so—here he goes."

He began to follow the negro's trail.

At the end of a few minutes he brought up before the pool, where the scouts had seen the ring-around-a-rosey wolf tracks. And here the negro's trail ended abruptly.

"Aber, I am nodt a hoondting tog like Cavuse unt Nomadt, idt iss a kvernees dot I cand't seen vare dot nigger has vent," he mused. "He iss came here, unt dhen he iss—wanished."

He looked at the pool, and all round. Then he looked at the hills and the sky.

"Dit dot stone by my head on make oof me a foolish? Der rigger, he iss came here, unt he iss nodt vent away; unt he iss nodt here. Oof he yoomped into dot vater he vouldt haf to schvim oudt by der odder site; oddervise, he issrowned, like dot Inchun by der rifer in. Ach!" He stared at the pool. "I vonder."

He continued to wonder as he made his way back to camp.

CHAPTER X.

THE POOL OF MYSTERY.

"You're the lucky pocket piece of this bunch," said Pawnee Bill, when the baron made his singular report. "When other men fail you just blunder into things."

"Idt vos him," said the baron, giving credit to the Trouble Maker, which he drew out and exhibited. "I am vishing for trouple unt oxcidement, and he iss pring idt py me."

The certain knowledge that Rastus Grimesby was in the vicinity put new life into every one, and there was a bustle of hurry as preparations were made for extending the baron's overbrieff investigation of the negro's trail. Ruff Reynolds listened to the talk with much interest. Though he had lost some faith in his men, who had not hastened to his release as he had anticipated, he had not given over entirely his hope of some time laying his hands on that treasure.

"We're ready now," the scout announced, speaking to the Brandons; "and if you will stay here and guard the camp we'll make a quiet search on the other side of the river."

"Maybe I can shake myself out o' this, with only them young uns hyar," thought the prisoner, as he saw the scout and his party depart.

The crossing of the river was made half a mile down. A bend at that point made the stream invisible to any one on the bluff or anywhere above. The canoe was concealed in some willows.

Then a stealthy movement followed, which swung them round the base of the bluff and along the rising ground.

When they had gone on for more than a mile the baron sank to the ground.

"Right pefore us," he whispered; "idt iss der rock vare I am hidt py my head on unt der nigger iss skib oudt—der rock is sdill vare I haf lefdt idt."

They saw a small elevation, on the lower slope of the bluff.

They were about to slip forward, for the purpose of picking up the negro's trail, when the scout heard some slight sound, that made him look off to the left. With a warning hiss, he drew down Pawnee, who was crouching and peering at his side.

"A horse," he said, "and a man—over there."

"By the pool?"

"In that direction, anyway."

"I don't see anything."

"No; I; but I heard the horse stamp, and heard the man speak to it. But—listen."

"The negro—and he is singing!" said Pawnee, when everything was still again.

"De cotton needs a hoein';
But de watermillion's growin';
An' ol' joy is overflowin',
Neaf de honeysuckle tree.

"So make has', trouble, an' leave dis happy lan';
Pick up yo' feet, trouble, an' jine de movin' ban';
Fo' ol' joy is overflowin', neaf de honeysuckle tree,
An' trouble nevehmo' can trouble me."

"Thar's yer darky, Schnitz, shore as shootin'," said Nomad. "An' I reckon we can rake him in. Ol' trouble will be botherin' him some erg'in, too, when we does."

They moved silently in the direction of the droning song.

Before they came in sight of him they heard the negro cackling laughter and exclaiming:

"Trouble has sho' been reachin' fo' me; but I reckon I has got him well behin' me now; yas, suh."

He spoke to the horse.

"Stan' still, dah! If yo' go 'way, I's a-goin' tuh bus' yo' haid. Yo' heah me? Yo' stay hyuh while I bring up dem things."

"Scatter out and make a circle," ordered the scout. "As he, has a horse, if we come on him from this side only, he may escape us."

They "scattered," and by circuitous routes descended upon Rastus.

When he was in sight they saw that he had lugged up a number of buckskin bags, and was tossing them to the back of the horse, which was a mustang of the Indian variety. He had not yet secured the bags in position, but was running a rope through his hands, shaking out the kinks.

He began humming his song again; then he began to rope the bags.

"On him now," said the scout, to Pawnee, who was nearest.

When they rose up on three sides of him, the darky jumped behind the mustang, with an exclamation of fright.

"Surrender!" called the scout.

Instead of obeying, Rastus made a froglike leap that took him to the back of the mustang, and started the animal with a shout.

Swinging the mustang over by the weight of his body, to send it past the pool, he was thrown into another fright by seeing the baron rise there into view, with his big revolver lifted.

"Surrender idt iss, or I am shoodting!" the baron shouted.

Behind were Buffalo Bill and Pawnee, on the right the baron, and on the left old Nomad, all now in view. Straight ahead, when the negro again swung the animal, was the pool.

For a moment he hesitated, twisting his head about as if searching for a way of escape; then he yelled again, drove his heels into the flank of the beast, and, as if in desperation, sent it at the pool.

The course was downhill—the pool being set in a rocky rim at the bottom of a sandy, circular incline. With the water before it, the mustang swerved, but the negro gave a strong yank on the bit, which flung the beast round, and the next moment it had gone into the pool, headforemost.

There was a thunderous splash, and the negro and mustang went under and out of sight.

By the time the astonished pursuers gained the rim of the pool the mustang was rising to the surface; but the bags of buckskin had slipped from its back. As it came up it struck out, frantic with fright.

"I wish I had Chick-Chick here, but——"

With the words, Pawnee released the lariat that swung at his waist. A toss of the hand sent the noose over the head of the struggling animal, as it came breasting the rim of the pool, and sought to climb out.

"Help here!" Pawnee bellowed.

The character of the rocky rim, Pawnee had seen, would prevent the mustang from getting out without aid.

Willing hands laid hold of the lariat, and, thus aided, the beast finally gained a footing, and struggled out on the sand.

Then they waited for the negro to appear.

But they waited in vain.

"Waal, what do ye make o' thet?" said Nomad. Then he added: "I has known a wild duck ter be wounded and go down, then hang onto a root at ther bottom till it drowned, jes' tryin' ter git erway from its inimy."

"Ach, du lieber!" the baron gasped, his eyes popping. "Der meanness oof dot iss beyondt me."

Five minutes went by, and the negro was not seen again in that time.

"Dead or otherwise, he isn't coming to the surface, necarnis," commented Pawnee. "It makes me think hard about that Indian who played a similar trick out on the river. We've chased a lot of theories about that, you know—for we couldn't believe the fellow had been drowned.

"But what else, ef a feller jumps inter worter," said Nomad, "an' don't come up?"

"Dot nigger, he iss sure a goneness!" declared the baron, still staring in amazement.

"You noticed," remarked the scout, "when we came on him, didn't you, that his clothing was wet, and the buckskin bags looked as if they had been given a wetting?"

"Ach!" said the baron; "he hadt a Trouple Maker, too! Only, idt vos tifferent. Vot iss to be dit, huh?"

Turning from the pool, they looked at the mustang, which, having given its wet hide a shake, was standing close by, as if bewildered by what had occurred.

On one of its hips was a peculiar brand—an arrow crossed on a bow.

"Blackfoot!" said the scout, when he observed that. "I wonder where he got it?"

"Stole et, o' course," said Nomad.

"There are Blackfeet on the other fork, above here," Pawnee reminded him. "You remember the sacred grove, and the Blackfeet boys who were performing stunts in it, to fit themselves for warriors?"

But they turned once more to the pool, which held greater fascination and suggested many more questions.

Buffalo Bill was rapidly developing theories; or, rather, finishing out certain ones which had lain in his mind undeveloped.

"Figure it out with me," he said to Pawnee. "First comes the Indian who rose in the river and went down without reappearing. Next, the queer sounds we heard that seemed to have their origin under this bluff, or in the river. The wolf tracks round this pool furnish the third thing to be noted. And now this singular disappearance of the negro, with the fact that when we saw him here his clothing and the buckskin bags were wet."

"Unt he vos of a vetness vhen he seen me," reminded the baron.

"That is to be remembered, too."

"I see what yer'e comin' at," said Nomad; "but et is foolishness."

"Is it?" said the scout.

"Plum' craziness."

Sitting down, the scout began to strip off his boots and some of his clothing.

"I'm going into that pool," he said. "In the first place, if the negro struck his head and was drowned there, we want to know it; and that's the way to find out. In the second place, if he didn't——"

Before protests could deter him, he had stepped to the edge of the pool, shot out into it, and had disappeared.

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled. "I don't like thet none whatever."

"Necarnis isn't a man to be drowned easily," assured Pawnee. "He'll be up again in a few moments."

But Pawnee was mistaken.

However, he did not let even a minute go by before he, too, began to strip for the plunge.

"Yiminy grickedts! You are going in, too?" said the baron.

"Sure thing, Schnitz. If Buffalo Bill is in trouble down there—and it looks it—we can easily be too late—perhaps are now—while we stand talking about it."

He, too, shot into the pool, and dropped out of sight.

And he did not come up again.

"Waugh!" Nomad woofed. "Er-waugh! Suthin's wrong hyar, baron."

He threw off his coat.

The baron laid hold of him.

"Nit!" he yelled. "I haf zwei friendts down dare now, unt some more, he issn't going. You sday py me."

Nomad flung him off.

"Schnitz, do thet some more," he roared, "an' I'll hammer yer head. I'm goin' inter thet ef I never sees daylight erg'in."

He leaped wildly into the pool, and disappeared.

Standing by it, white-faced, with drops of sweat breaking out on his forehead, the baron watched the troubled surface of the water, while the slow seconds crawled by.

"Ein, zwei, drei," he counted. "Yumpin' yiminy, he iss gone, too, unt likewise! I am all der lonesomeness dot iss lefddt."

He beat his breast, and seemed about to follow into the pool.

"No," he said. "Vot iss der usefulness? I haf to go pack py der camp unt dell idt—somepody has got to do dot. Oddervise——"

Drawing the Trouble Maker out of his pocket, he flung it into the pool.

"Trown, too!" he yelled. "Idt iss you vot haf made all der tifficuldy. Fairst idt iss der nigger, unt dhen idt iss—ach, du lieber! I am a craziness!"

Five minutes went by, with the baron objurgating the Trouble Maker and himself. The Trouble Maker had gone down, as if it sought to make further trouble in the watery regions below.

At the end of that time, paying no heed to the Blackfoot mustang, the baron started for the river, mad with grief and fear, determined to reach the camp as quickly as he could and communicate to the Brandons his startling intelligence.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT LAY AT THE BOTTOM OF THE POOL.

Old Nomad, the last to leap into the pool of mystery, dropped to the bottom like a plummet, and began to feel about, expecting to discover the bodies of his friends.

The course of his descent had taken him to one side, and his outstretched arm was thrust into a large hole.

"They came the same way down as I did, and got stuck in hyar, mebbysso," was his thought.

He knew he had to work quickly—already his lungs

were straining—but he crawled into the hole, to make sure they were not in it, before searching the bottom.

At the end of a yard there was no roof over him, and he rose involuntarily, thrust up by the weight of the water. Instantly his breath came, as air struck his wet face.

"Woof!" he breathed, sucking in a big draft. "Whar I'm at I dunno, but——"

He was grasped by the shoulder, and some one pulled him.

"This you, Nomad?"

The question was put by Pawnee.

"Wow! By all ther tarantulars——"

He was spaked out, and found himself on a smooth rock, at the side of the water.

"Is the baron coming?" Pawnee asked.

"Wow! Lemme git my breath! I dunno whar I'm at, ner—— No, I dunno ef ther baron is comin' er not. Whar's Buffler?"

"Right here," came in the scout's familiar voice. "I thought you would come, after Pawnee. We're expecting the baron next."

The baron did not come.

A bit of waiting gave the borderman his breath; but, in the meantime, the scout had dropped into the water, and was about to go back, to make sure the baron had not plunged into the pool. But in this he was stopped by a warning hiss from Pawnee Bill.

"'Sh! The beggars have heard us again! 'Ware, necarnis!"

Looking round, Nomad saw flickering lights and the forms of Indians.

"That's why we stayed," explained Pawnee, "instead of returning at once. Those ki-yis came close up here before; they heard us, and I'm afraid they heard Nomad. For goodness' sake, old Diamond, put a stopper on your wind-jamming."

Nomad subdued his heavy breathing.

"Whar aire we at?" he whispered again.

"In a cave."

"Waugh!"

"This stream connects with that pool, and the water here rises to the level of its surface. I say stream, but it isn't—for the water has no movement. So it's our opinion, Nomad, that it connects straight with the river, and only rises and falls as the river rises and falls. Do you see daylight?"

"I don't see nothin' but them lights. An', as they're

comin' hyar, I reckon we'd best drap back a bit, er git out by ther worter route, 'fore they reach us."

"And so fail to see what we want to see mighty badly right now! If you think the baron is all right up there, we'll crawl back a little, and do a watching stunt."

"Schnitz shore is all right—he hates worter. Ef et war beer now——"

Buffalo Bill pulled at his sleeve, and he began to crawfish away from the stream. But they stopped when they had gone a short distance.

There were a dozen or more of the Indians, all young Blackfeet, as Buffalo Bill made out by the light of the flickering torches they carried. In connection with the Blackfoot mustang outside, this was suggestive. The young Indians were looking at some tracks, and these they trailed away after, instead of coming right up to the water.

"They're following the tracks of Rastus," said the scout, interpreting this movement correctly.

"What does et mean?" Nomad panted.

"We're still in the guessing zone, old Diamond," Pawnee informed him; "so we really don't know what it means, though we have done some surmising. You remember the Indian yelling which seemed to come out of the ground. Well, it's a cinch those young Blackfeet bucks put up that caterwauling."

"And made the thunder we heard," Buffalo Bill added. "They pounded on a big drum, or something of the kind."

"And," added Pawnee, "they must have been burning something that time which gave out the smell of violets. And played the ring-around-the-rosy game, with wolf-feet moccasins, out by that pool."

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled softly, peering at the retreating Indians. "We'll have ter swim out an' tell Schnitz erbout this, soon's we can. He'll be——"

"Speaking of Schnitz, I guess we'd better get back, and acquaint ourselves with that pool again. That fool Dutchman may do something which he ought to leave alone."

"Take er plunge, same's I did?"

They got back to the edge of the water. Then Buffalo Bill swam through the opening, rose inside the rim of the pool, and looked for the baron.

But the baron had back-tracked, to bear the news to the Brandons. Making sure that he had not entered the pool, Buffalo Bill returned to the cave.

"Talk erbout wetness," grumbled Nomad, as the

scout crawled out beside him; "mus'rats ain't in et with us three."

"The ki-yis have faded," Pawnee reported. "So what's to be the next move?"

"Follow them, see what they're up to, and look for that negro."

"One thing we're forgetting," said Pawnee; "the buckskin bags that were on that mustang. He went down with them, but he didn't come up with them, you remember?"

Buffalo Bill went into the pool again.

"They're down there—at the bottom," he said, on his return; "and, from the feel and heft, they're filled with gold nuggets. He hadn't lashed them well, and when the mustang went under they slipped from its back; and he didn't have time to do anything with them. When he came up in here he was made to hustle by the Blackfeet. We'll get them later—if some one isn't ahead of us. But not all the bags of nuggets are there."

The torches flickering into view again, the three friends crept off after the young Blackfeet.

They discovered some surprising things, too. The cave was of large extent and had several galleries. The water in the pool, in the cave, and in the river connected, as they had surmised. In fact, the underground water and that in the pool was backwater from the river.

The torches of the Blackfeet, as they continued a devious search for Rastus Grimesby, flickered on queer drawings on the walls—outline figures of Indian gods, animals, serpents.

In the pine grove where the negro had cached the gold and then lost it, as described in the opening chapter of this story, the trees exhibited similar strange outlines. That was a sacred grove of the Blackfeet, to which the young men of the tribe resorted when they arrived at the proper age. There they performed sacred ceremonies, fasted, prayed to the gods, danced religious dances, and often even tortured themselves, that they might be made worthy of the high calling of Blackfeet warriors.

To the experienced scouts it was plain that the cave they had so singularly entered was, after the same fashion, a sacred cave. The entrance into it of a man of another tribe or race was considered a desecration. Hence the young Blackfeet were trying to find the negro.

Though a number of things were still dark, the scouts were working toward enlightenment. They did

not know about Bill Garner. But they were sure the negro had been given help by a white man.

Then they beheld Garner himself. He was a prisoner of the young Blackfeet. Bound hand and foot, he was held in a wide gallery, where an olla of fat, with a wick floating in it, burned with a sputtering blue flame—and gave forth an odor of violets.

Back of him rose a sandstone image, hideously painted—an image of an Indian god or devil, whose construction and decoration must have racked the imagination of the Blackfoot artist.

There were but half a dozen young Blackfeet in this gallery when the scouts discovered it; the others were still out searching for Rastus Grimesby, whom they furiously desired to deposit by the side of their prisoner.

Lying in the black shadows beyond the gallery entrance, the three friends stared at the scene, and commented on the fact that the prisoner seemed to be an Indian.

But they almost instantly divined the truth—this painted Sioux prisoner, as Garner looked to be, was a white man, the white man who had been seen in the river, and undoubtedly the one who had flim-flammed Nomad and the baron and fled with the nugget bags in the canoe.

Sight of him there made them anxious to have a talk with him. If their belief was true, he knew where the other bags of nuggets were, and he knew the windings of the cave.

"The mystery is clearing up a heap, necarnis," Pawnee whispered. "That rascal must have taken refuge in this place; and then the Blackfeet came for their religious performances, and he was up against trouble. Likewise the negro, who was with him. It looks that way."

"I reckon them young bucks aire figgerin' on torturin' him up some," Nomad declared. "He is desarvin' o' all he can git—on gin'ral princerples, an' specially 'count o' thet red-pepper trick—yit I allus hates ter know of a white man bein' toyed with thet way by a lot o' ornery ki-yis."

"They will do so with Rastus, too," said Pawnee, "if they can smoke him out. I wonder where the rascal is hiding?"

"No doubt," added the scout, "he was in here long enough, before they came, to have learned the ins and outs of this cave, and has hustled into some snug place."

They spent many minutes trying to decide on a proper course of action.

In the end their line of conduct was mapped out for them by Garner. A wily fellow, he had been quietly loosening up the cords that held his wrists; and, succeeding finally, he cast them off, caught a knife from a young Blackfoot, struck the Indian with it, ripped the bonds from his leg, and sprang away.

The whole thing was done in a flash, and almost before the concealed white men understood what was happening, Bill Garner was sprinting along the gallery toward them.

The young Blackfeet who had been crooning before the Indian god jumped to the aid of the one who had been struck down, instead of at once darting after their escaping prisoner.

Garner would have passed the white men lying at the gallery end, and might have escaped by way of the pool, but as he went flying past the outstretched fingers of the scout hooked round an ankle, and Garner came down.

Before he could rise, Garner felt a pistol against his head, and heard the voice of Buffalo Bill whispering in his ears.

"Quiet, or I'll drill you!"

The scout's pards crawled up in the darkness.

A jerk of the hand of the scout planted a noose round Garner's neck.

"Straight ahead now; a hurry-hustle, and not a sound!"

They got away from the gallery end before the young Blackfeet came pouring out, and were off at one side, crouching in the darkness, with weapons drawn; Garner still held by them.

It was as well for the youthful Blackfeet that just then they did not stumble against the concealed white men.

Apparently convinced that Garner had run straight toward the pool, the Indians darted in that direction, without torches, in their haste. They thought of torches afterward.

Not knowing in what direction safety lay, the scouts moved off in the direction of the river, forcing Garner to go ahead of them.

At the end of ten minutes Garner growled out:

"If you go farther you'll be right in the river."

"So you've got your tongue at last, and have forgotten that you are a painted and feathered Sioux warrior!" whispered the scout.

The prisoner smothered an exclamation of disgust.

"We know you are a white man—the one who walked off with the bags of nuggets from our camp

down on the Missou," added Pawnee. "We've found some of them, and know where the darky is. So you might as well loosen up."

"I'll tell all I know," said Garner, "if you'll let me go. I didn't dream you fellers was in here, though I knowed you was round. As fer that nigger——"

He went off in a stream of profanity.

"Thoughts of him seem to rile ye," said Nomad.

Garner admitted it.

"He abandoned me," he said. "When the Blackfeet had hooked onto me, he cut out without liftin' a finger."

"He was out beyond the pool with a stolen Blackfoot mustang," said the scout, "and some of the nugget bags, ready to ride away."

"He went out by that suck hole, did he? Them nugget bags we got up out of—waal, out of whar they was hid; and we was figgerin' on gittin' 'em out of the cave when the Blackfeet jumped me. If ever I meet up with that treach'rous nigger I'll——"

"You're going to show us where the other nuggets are," said the scout smoothly.

"I reckon you'll be havin' yer hands full, right soon," said Garner evasively, "fightin' them Blackfeet."

"They're only jes' boys," Nomad sniffed.

"We'll think about fighting the Blackfeet," said the scout, "when they attack us. They're making a search over by the suck hole, as you call it, right now; so for the present we're safe enough. When they crowd us, if it's needed, we're going to have you show us that hole, by which you get out of the cave here into the river—the hole you used when you came out that time, now more than a week ago, and we saw you!"

"Wash thet paint off," said Nomad, peering through the darkness, "an' I 'low I'd know ye. Though it's a s'prise to see ye hyar, you're Bill Garner. I has heerd your gentle voice before. Last time I heard et was in Mogollon, when ther sheriff of ther county war lookin' fer ye, in the hotel thar; an' ye jumped through a winder an' got erway."

"If I tell all I know, and show whar the nuggets aire," said Garner, trembling now, "will ye lemme go, Cody? Sence thet nigger has gone back on me, and——"

"Waugh!" Nomad grumbled, twisting round. "Them Blackfoot youngsters aire rompin' this way. Ef I has ter fight, I likes ter fight men."

"Do you show us the way through here to the river," said the scout to Garner, "or do we release you to the Blackfeet?"

That was enough.

The terrible threats which the Blackfeet had made against him, and some gruesome preparations for carrying them out, had made him deathly afraid of them.

So he told of the river route.

CHAPTER XII.

BUFFALO BILL'S SIOUX TACKLE.

Buffalo Bill had two prisoners—Bill Garner and Ruff Reynolds. And he had the gold. Garner had weakened and told everything. Some of the bags of nuggets were at the bottom of the river, where they had been sunk by Garner and the negro after the invasion of the cave by the Blackfeet neophytes; the others were at the bottom of the pool. All had been recovered, after a deal of hard work and some danger.

The young Blackfeet had not dared to come out and fight the white men, and they had not tried to interfere seriously with the efforts made to recover the treasure.

Rastus had disappeared; it was practically certain that he had escaped from the cave and fled from the country.

Ruff Reynolds' followers had, days before, been frightened into leaving the place by the presence of the Indians and the many strange happenings, which had excited their fears and superstitions. In his helpless state, when he knew they were gone, and he could not look to them longer for deliverance, Ruff raved against them in a manner that did justice to his character.

The young Blackfeet were still in the cave, keeping close—though it was surmised that some had departed for the distant Blackfoot village, as messengers, to bring help from the warriors there—when Buffalo Bill's party set out down the Staghorn.

At its junction with the Missouri River they encountered a strong body of Sioux braves under Blue Wolf, the chieftain with ambitions for supremacy who had refused to submit to the dictation of Red Hand, and who, having gone into rebellion, had been able increasingly to draw larger and still larger forces to his standard of revolt.

There had been a battle fought between the contending factions, without decisive results. Red Hand was below, in the Missouri Valley, making preparations to meet his enemies.

Hence it came about that when Buffalo Bill's small band of fighting white men appeared, instead of resisting them, or making trouble, Blue Wolf sent in a

flag of truce, which he followed by coming in personally and offering an alliance.

"I am the friend of the great Pa-e-has-ka," he said. "His men have the long-shooting guns. And I am the friend of the children of the white man who was once chief of the Buffalo Killers, before Red Hand took by force the place he dishonors. We would sweep Red Hand and his braves from the face of the earth."

Then he made his offer—to the effect that if Buffalo Bill would help him, the white men could have free passage down the big river, with none to molest or make them afraid, after Red Hand had been defeated.

"He is our very great friend, necarnis," interrupted Pawnee, "because he thinks we can deliver the goods. It's often the way, eh—with white man and red?"

"It's our chance, though," urged the scout. "We should have to fight Red Hand, anyway."

The baron brought out the Trouble Maker—he had fished it out of the pool—and gave it a loving pat.

"You are der pitzness," he said. "Since I haf got you der oxcidement, he iss been coming right along, mitout mooch stoppings. Unt now idt iss some more. Yaw, when it comes to vorking oop oxcidement you are der skinch!"

Dozens of times the baron had been advised to "chuck it," and "burn it," but had refused.

Nomad was quite as eager for a brush with the Sioux under Red Hand; they had worried him enough, he said, and he wanted to get a whack at them. So he voted for joining Blue Wolf.

Buffalo Bill, though of the same mind, did not at once give Blue Wolf an answer—it would not do to show eagerness; so he smoked a pipe with the rebellious chieftain, and wasted oratory with him in the true redskin fashion.

One thing which he brought up, and on which he laid particular emphasis, as the peace pipe went round, concerned the girl—Louise Brandon.

"The great chief, Blue Wolf, has seen the paleface girl, and once he desired her for his own. But if we join the forces of Blue Wolf all such thoughts must be laid aside. The paleface pines for her own people. It is true that she is the daughter of a man who was once the Black Chief of the Buffalo Killers—and on that fact Blue Wolf based his claim—yet it must not be."

Blue Wolf, though, since entering the camp, he had shot admiring glances at the young woman who looked so bravely handsome in her masculine attire, was ready to yield gracefully.

"There are many handsome squaws in the Sioux

lodges, and Blue Wolf, when he has whipped the coward Red Hand, can have his pick. So what does one more matter? It shall be as the great Pa-e-has-ka says."

"Blue Wolf swears it by the peace pipe?" urged the scout.

"Aye, he swears it by the peace pipe."

"It is well."

"The wishes of Pa-e-has-ka are law unto Blue Wolf," declared the chief, with solemn gravity.

"And on the peace pipe he swears that my people here shall have free passage down the big river?"

"When we have swept the river valley clear of the warriors who rally round Red Hand."

"It is well."

Half a hundred braves were under Blue Wolf, bravely painted, and feathered to the limit. Blue Wolf, during his conference with the great scout, wore a war bonnet of eagle feathers of such wondrous proportions and length that, as Nomad remarked, he seemed ready to fly.

With their confidence marvelously increased by having with them the white men under Pa-e-has-ka, Blue Wolf and his warriors moved down the Missouri.

"It is as if we had been given an escort of Indians," said the girl, even though the situation made her nervous. "I really hope there will not be a fight."

But there was a fight—and a big one, twenty miles below the junction of the Missouri and the Staghorn.

Red Hand came boldly out and offered battle, confident in the superiority of numbers, and because he had not long before sent Blue Wolf's braves into rapid flight.

But this time he had fighting white men to deal with.

Buffalo Bill and his few followers set themselves in the forefront, with Blue Wolf and his choicest braves; and the charge they made on the threatening warriors of Red Hand has lived to this day in the stories of the border.

It became known as Buffalo Bill's Sioux tackle.

Before the fight ended Red Hand had fallen, under the stroke of his old rival, Blue Wolf, and his braves were scattered and in full flight.

Blue Wolf rode hard, after that, to bear news of his victory to the waiting lodges nestling along a Missouri tributary, out on the plains.

As always to the victor flock all those who have hesitated, so to the victorious Blue Wolf's standard came those who had until that time wavered. Red Hand's followers sued for peace, and the internecine war of the Buffalo Killer Sioux came to an end.

Buffalo Bill's little band were permitted to pass in peace through the Sioux lands, along the river, until they gained the borders of civilization.

The nuggets were taken through safely, and the two prisoners as well.

"Still," said the scout, in the end, "I have a feeling that we ought to have done better. 'The nuggets are not worth as much as we thought they were, and two prisoners are not the dozen and more we started out with.'"

"Yet," declared Pawnee, "it was a glorious victory. I know how you feel, necarnis—you want perfection. But just remember that it is a fruit that doesn't grow on many bushes."

They were talking it over when the battles, the trails, the trouble, and the mysteries were all far behind them.

"Budt vot made idt," urged the baron, exhibiting the Trouble Maker, "iss him. Gif efery vun his due!"

Buffalo Bill laughed.

"Chuck that in the fire," he ordered. "I've told you to more than a dozen times."

"Ach, du lieber! Him? Neffer yedt. Some dime or odder he iss goin' to hellup me findt dot nigger."

But Rastus Grimesby, stupid in some things, yet crafty in others as any redskin, remained among the missing.

THE END.

Mexican insurrectos, bandits, Indians, and government spies are bewilderingly mixed up in the story for the next issue: "Buffalo Bill and the Talking Statue; or, Pawnee Bill's Gold Trail." The Bills and their pards meet a mysterious man who tries to induce them to accompany him into the mountains in a search for a lost mine. They refuse his flattering offer, but capricious fate finally leads them into the very place he desired them to find, and adventures of an uncommon sort ensue. The story will be out August 26th, and the number will be 537.



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